

Bucks fails in ozone report

The American Lung Association ranked the county second-worst in air pollution behind Philadelphia

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Bucks County continues to struggle with high levels of air pollution, putting its residents at risk of lung-related ailments, according to a new report card from the American Lung Association. The effects on Burlington County across the Delaware River are unknown: There are no monitoring stations in the county,

where prevailing winds from Bucks County typically blow.

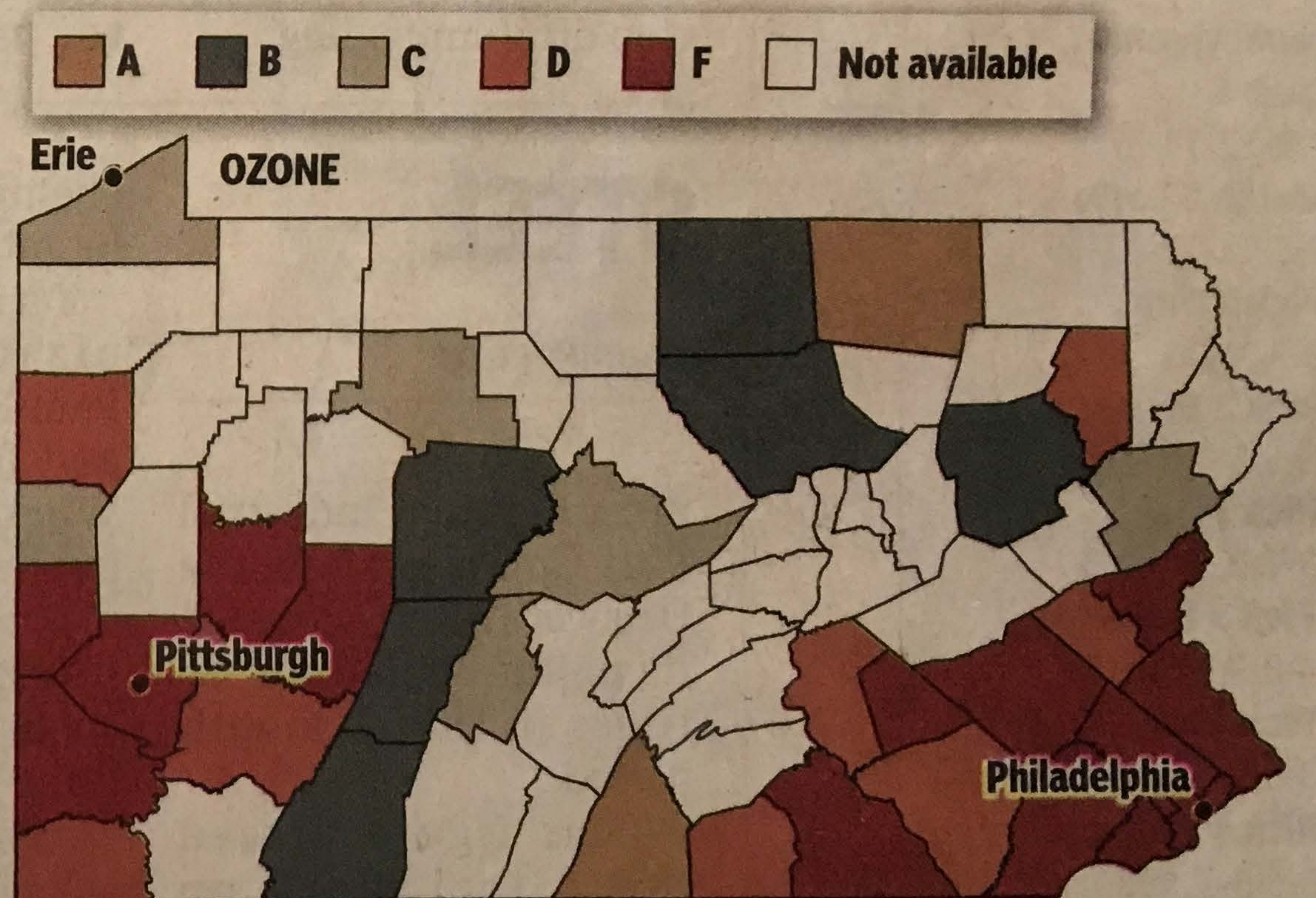
The ALA annually releases its "State of the Air" report, which analyzes air pollution levels across the country. Released this week was its 2018 report, which reviewed data from 2014 to 2016 and gave Bucks a "failing" grade. Bucks joined 13 other Pennsylvania counties with a failing grade, although a scoring system ranked Bucks second worst overall, just behind Philadelphia.

"Bucks County is one of the areas that has a long history of F's," said Kevin Stewart,

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Pennsylvania air

Here are county-by-county grades for air quality in Pennsylvania.



Sources: American Lung Association; maps4news/@HERE

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OZONE

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director of environmental health with the American Lung Association's Mid-Atlantic Region.

The ALA tracks air quality by reviewing data pulled from Environmental Protection Agency and state air monitoring stations. It primarily focuses on "ozone," a hazardous gas commonly referred to as smog.

The EPA itself says smog is a hazardous gas that forms when "pollutants emitted by cars, power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, chemical plants and other sources react chemically in the presence of sunlight."

While many people may think of smog as just a hazy cloud, it poses a health risk. Chronic inhalation of smog can irritate the respiratory system, reduce lung function, aggravate asthma and damage the lining of the lungs. Continual exposure also can affect development in the lungs of children, harming them later in life, and speeding up the natural aging process of adults, the EPA says.

The EPA standard for ozone is 70 parts per billion (ppb), which was lowered in 2015 from a previous standard of 75 ppb. The American Lung Association

studied three years' worth of data and counted the number of "orange" days, where levels reach between 71 and 85 ppb, and "red" days, where levels reached from 86 to 105 ppb. Orange days are considered unsafe for sensitive populations such as those with asthma and other lung ailments, while red days are unhealthy for all.

Philadelphia and Bucks were neck and neck for worst in the state, according to the ALA's report. Philadelphia had 25 orange days and three red days, measured at the Northeast Philadelphia Airport, while Bucks had 26 orange days and two red days, measured in Bristol Township.

Burlington County does not have a monitoring station, but all of New Jersey's counties have been designated "nonattainment areas" by the EPA due to their proximity to either Philadelphia or New York City.

While the ALA's report card was completed prior to all data being available for 2017, Pennsylvania DEP records show Bucks surpassing Philadelphia for ozone pollution last year. According to the DEP's website, Bucks exceeded 70 ppb for ozone during 12 days last year, and exceeded 75 ppb during eight.

Philadelphia saw slightly less days of noncompliance, with 11 days over 70 ppb and

four over 75 ppb.

This news organization conducted an in-depth investigation into air pollution in Lower Bucks County last year. We reviewed health data showing elevated rates of ailments such as asthma and lung cancer in Lower Bucks communities, as well as across the Delaware River in Burlington City. The reporting also demonstrated that some of both counties' lowest income communities were closest to industrial sites and highways that are typical contributors to ozone.

Stewart, with the American Lung Association, says his organization predicts air pollution levels will continue to worsen nationally. He primarily pins the prediction on climate change, which is causing rising temperatures.

"The higher the temperatures, the more ozone that is made," Stewart said. "We can expect this trend in terms of hotter temperatures, hotter years to continue."

He recommends those concerned with air pollution take steps to reduce their contribution by engaging in ride-sharing, taking public transportation, decreasing their home energy use, and even refueling cars during evening hours. He also encourages those in rural areas not to

burn trash or leaves.

Stewart also recommends visiting AirNow.gov to review air pollution levels, particularly for sensitive populations, before spending time outdoors, and visiting lung.org to use the organization's tools for contacting elected officials.

"We want people to let (politicians) know that clean air is important to them," Stewart said.

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