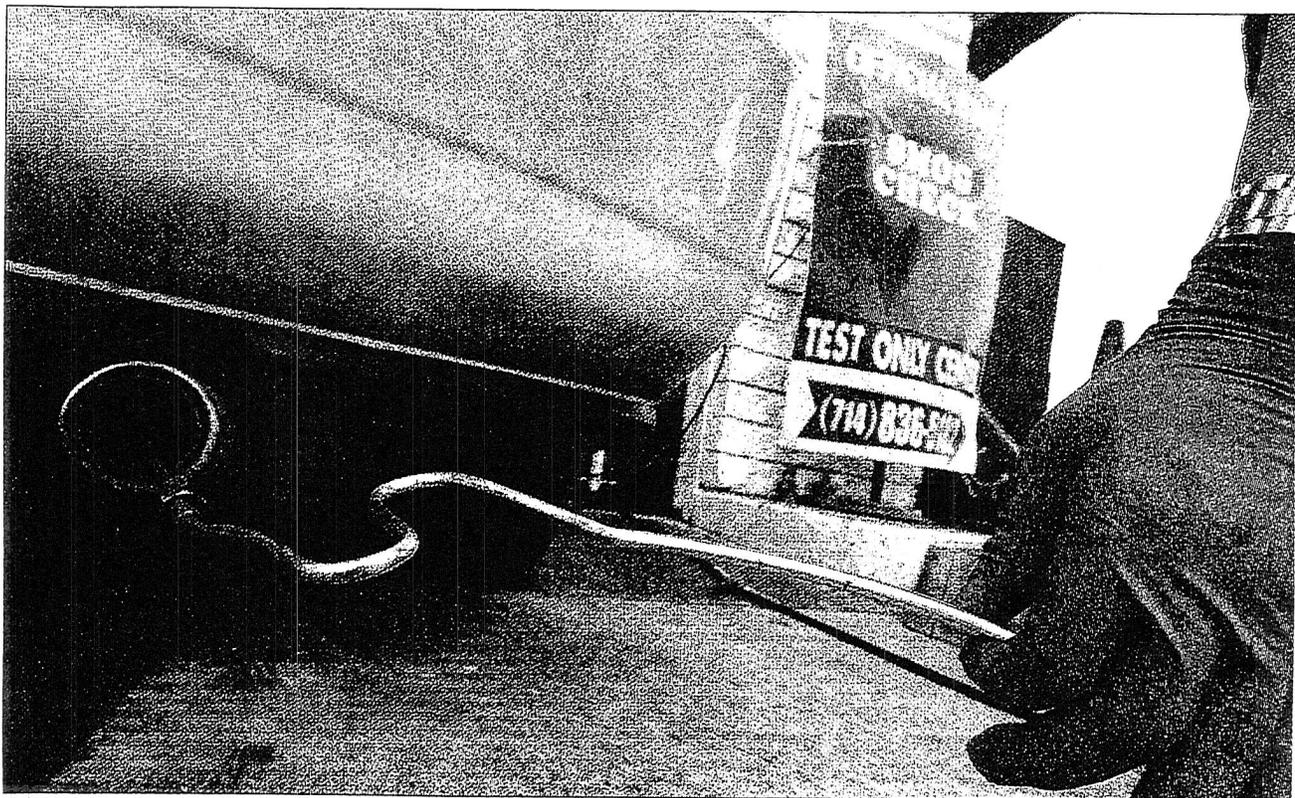


THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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Breathe a bit easier

Our air is getting a little cleaner, but the county still ranks high on smog levels.



MICHAEL GOULDING, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

SMOG CHECK: A measurement of the car's exhaust emissions is part of the state-required smog test.

By **PAT BRENNAN**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

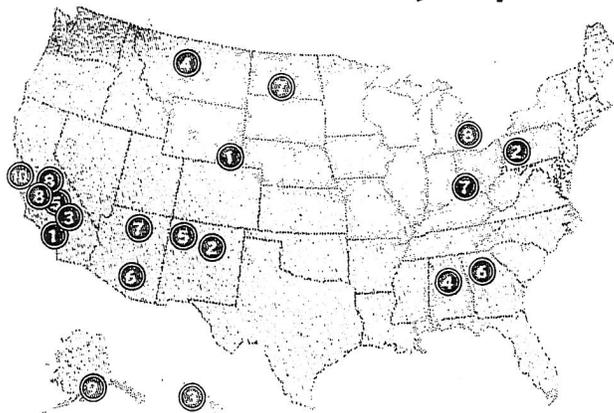
California still leads the pack with the smoggiest cities in the nation, and Orange County received failing grades for three types of air pollution, the latest report from the American Lung Association says.

But the news isn't all grim. The state saw significant improvement in many areas, including the smoggiest - Los Angeles.

"You've come a long way and made admirable progress," Jan-

SEE **SMOG** • PAGE 15

Best and worst air quality



Source: American Lung Association
The Register

Note: These rankings are for year-round particle pollution; study also ranked ozone pollution

Dirtiest cities

- 1 Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
- 2 Pittsburgh-New Castle
- 3 Bakersfield
- 4 Birmingham-Hoover-Cullman
- 5 Visalia-Porterville
- 6 Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Gainesville
- 7 Cincinnati-Middletown-Wilmington
- 8 Fresno-Madera
- 9 Hanford-Corcoran
- 10 Detroit-Warren-Flint

Cleanest cities

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| 1 Cheyenne | 9 Tucson |
| 2 Santa Fe-Espanola | 10 Bismarck |
| 3 Honolulu | 1 Flagstaff |
| 4 Great Falls | 2 Anchorage |
| 5 Farmington | 3 Salinas |

SMOG

FROM PAGE 1

ice Nolen of the Lung Association told Los Angeles-area reporters in a telephone news conference. "But I think you came from farther back. You have farther to go."

The region received kudos from the association for aggressive smog control efforts, including the state smog check program.

Nationwide, air pollution appears to have leveled off since the advocacy group's last report in 2007. In the ranking of health risk from short-term exposure to fine-particle pollution, Pittsburgh surpassed the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside area for the No. 1 spot, the first time the region has been bumped from a top slot since the group began tracking particle pollution in 2004.

Los Angeles, along with Long Beach and Riverside, still topped the lists for long-term particle pollution and ozone, both of which can damage lungs and worsen a variety of diseases.

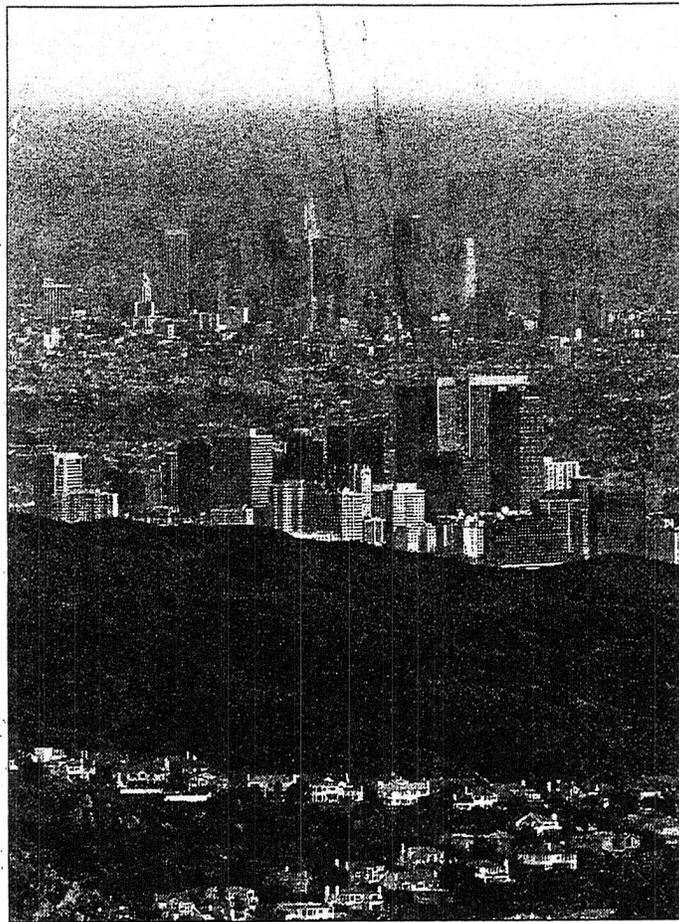
The Lung Association tallies statistics from smog monitoring equipment throughout the nation each year; the new report covers the period from 2004 to 2006 - the most recent available.

Orange County tends to have lower pollution levels because of wind and geography. Most of our smog blows inland.

That didn't stop us, however, from landing high on some of the association's lists. Nationwide, Orange County made No. 14 on the list of the 25 counties with the greatest health risk from short-term exposure to fine-particle pollution - that is, less than 24 hours.

Orange County also received failing grades for the number of days during which ozone and particle pollution violated federal air-quality standards during the three-year study period.

In fact, since the group began tracking ozone pollution in 2000 and fine particles in 2004, Orange County has re-



FILE PHOTO: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HAZE: Los Angeles sits under a blanket of smog on Jan. 14, 2000. The area has significantly improved, by one measure.

ceived straight F's in all three categories, except for a "D" period for ozone in 2003 and 2004.

Ozone, cooked up by sunlight when fossil fuels are burned, is one of the most commonly measured pollutants. Fine particles, including soot, ash and dust, are getting more attention these days because they can work their way deep into the lungs.

The Lung Association's report says asthma patients and those with heart and lung disease are especially vulnerable to harmful health effects.

The group called for stepped-up control of ozone pollution, avoiding changes proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency that the group says would weaken the Clean Air Act, and stronger controls on coal-fired power plants, especially in the eastern United States.

The association's picture isn't perfect. The data come only from counties with air pol-

lution monitors, but out of more than 3,000 counties nationwide, only 700 have such monitors. So much of the national map is a blank.

And not everyone sees the same picture. The association disagrees with the federal government on pollution standards - so much so it is suing to make the federal standards more stringent. That often leads to harsher assessments of health risk from the advocacy group than from the agencies that regulate smog.

Perhaps the biggest disconnection will become evident next year, during the Lung Association's next assessment. Federal ozone standards were tightened in March, but it was too late for the association's statistical analysis this time around.

That means the next assessment will probably appear much more dire. But much of that will be because of stricter standards, not worsening pollution.