

Riverside County not big source of fine-air pollution

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The Press-Enterprise

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Riverside County now has proof that it can't be blamed for having the worst air quality in Southern California.

A new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report found that the county had the region's highest concentrations of harmful fine-particle pollution but generated far less of the airborne crud than Los Angeles County, which had cleaner air.

Los Angeles County sources put out 16,764 tons of the pollutants that form fine particles, almost three times more than Riverside County's 5,314 tons, the EPA estimated, based on 2005 emissions data.

The EPA's report recommended that the South Coast Air Basin, consisting of Orange County and urban portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, be officially designated a "nonattainment area," meaning the region fails to meet the federal health standard for daily level of fine particles.

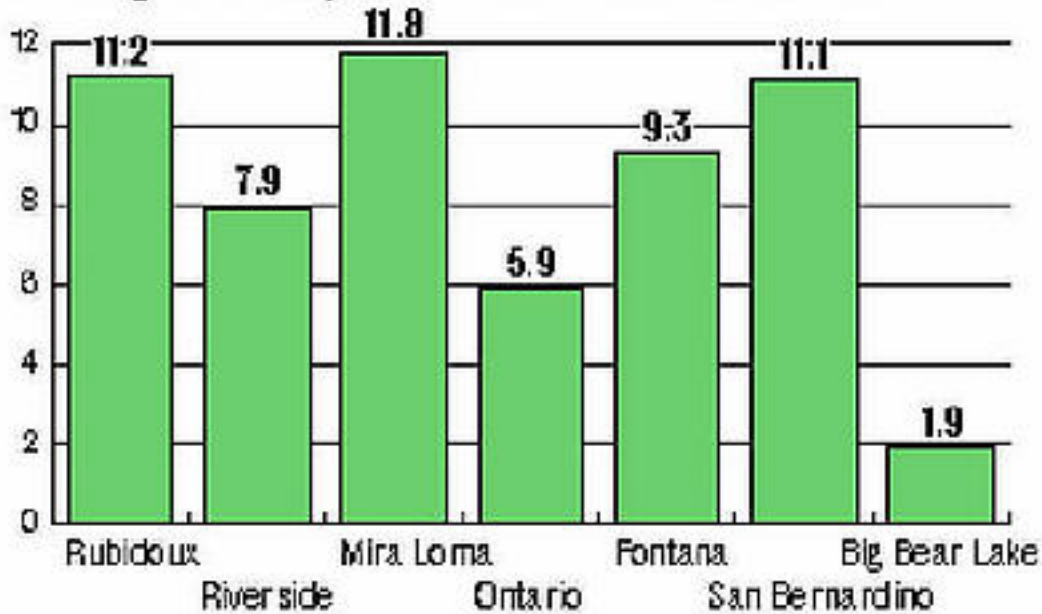
Fine-particle pollution is a toxic combination of diesel soot, various chemical compounds, dust and other tiny specs. State officials estimate that more than 6,000 people die in Southern California prematurely each year because of exposure to fine particles.

Findings No Surprise

Story continues below

AIR POLLUTION: Several Inland communities regularly surpass the federal 24-hour health standard for fine-particle pollution.

Percentage of air samples over federal health standard in 2007:



SOURCE: SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

MARILYN ODELL/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

The EPA findings, released Aug. 18, came as no surprise to regional air quality officials.

The northwest part of Riverside County is on the receiving end of pollution generated at ports, freeways and factories in Los Angeles and Orange counties. Sea breezes push the pollution inland, and the chemicals react with each other on the way to create fine particles. The microscopic particles can penetrate the body's normal defenses to cause a range of illnesses.

San Bernardino County had the third-worst pollution in the region but generated a hefty 12,043 tons of the emissions, the EPA report found. Based on air-quality readings from 2005 through 2007, San Bernardino ranked slightly better than Los Angeles County but worse than Orange County.

Pollution statistics from the South Coast Air Quality Management District shows that more than 11 percent of samples collected at air-monitoring stations in Mira Loma, Rubidoux and San Bernardino failed to meet federal health standards for daily levels of fine-particle pollution.

Effect on Health

Short-term exposure to such pollution has been linked to early deaths, heart attacks and hospitalizations for asthma attacks and acute respiratory problems, said USC epidemiologist and professor James Gauderman, author of several air pollution studies.

Long-term exposure to fine-particle pollution has different health consequences, such as slowed lung development in children. Brief episodes tend to cause sudden ailments like heart attacks. That's why it's important to control both 24-hour and annual averages of the pollution, according to the EPA.

The EPA will take public comments until Dec. 18 on the fine-particle problem, and regional and state officials will have three years to put together plans to reduce the pollution.

Air district spokesman Sam Atwood said the regional agency is working under a separate EPA deadline to cut annual averages of fine-particle pollution by 2015. Any headway will help meet both daily and annual goals, he said.

An air district rule approved in March places the first restrictions on home fireplaces. It will establish no-burn days by 2011, allow only gas fireplaces in new homes starting next year and already has banned trash-burning in fireplaces, among other provisions.

Meeting the federal clean-air standards will require more state and federal rules to reduce pollution from cars, trucks, ships, planes and locomotives, air district officials say.

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POLLUTION COMMENTS

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency wants Southern California to clean up fine-particle pollution and is seeking public comments on the issue.

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