

Millions of Americans Breathe Unsafe Air

According to the *State of the Air 2005* report, published by the [American Lung Association](#) (ALA), air pollution levels improved in many parts of the nation during the first few years of the new millennium, but millions of Americans still face dangerous levels of air pollution.

The ALA report highlights the sad fact that, despite pro-environmental sentiment and strong regulations, more than half of the U.S. population lives in counties with unsafe levels of either smog or particle pollution. Smog is the worst offender and is often directly responsible for cases of decreased lung function, respiratory infection, lung inflammation and aggravation of respiratory illness. Some 143 million Americans live in counties rated with failing grades by the ALA for this airborne pollutant.

Meanwhile, another 77 million Americans live in areas where they are exposed to unhealthy short-term levels of particle pollution. Children and the elderly are especially at risk. Short-term, or acute, exposure to particle pollution has been linked to increases in heart attacks, strokes, and emergency-room visits for asthma and cardiovascular disease. Particle pollution is most dangerous to those already suffering from asthma, heart disease, bronchitis and emphysema.