

April 21, 2017

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ALA Misses the Mark yet Again

As was reported in the *Auburn Journal* Thursday, April 20, 2017, the American Lung Association has once again inappropriately given Placer County an “F” grade on air quality in their 2017 State of the Air Report for ozone and short-term particle pollution. The Placer County Air Pollution Control District is extremely disappointed that the ALA report unfairly fails to recognize that the region currently meets federal health based air quality standards for short-term particle pollution, and is on track to meet similar standards for summertime ozone within the next several years.

From the Sacramento Valley, into the northern portion of Lake Tahoe, Placer County’s geography and climate bring with them many challenges: remote and rural communities with mountainous terrain, metropolitan areas, major vehicular arteries, a transcontinental railroad route, and more frequent catastrophic wildfires which result in significant air pollution; not to mention the pollution that drifts north and west from the more urban areas such as Sacramento, Stockton and the Bay Area. In addition, health based federal air quality standards are continually being tightened to better improve public health protection, that require ever increasing efforts to reduce pollution. Furthermore, the County’s considerable growth since the 1990’s, with Placer County often ranked near the top of statewide growth trends, has required creative strategies to ensure that the region can continue to grow and that increased air pollution from an expanding population does not inhibit economic prosperity or degrade our quality of life.

Despite these challenges, extensive strides have been made in reducing air pollution and improving air quality in Placer County. For example, the number of smoggy summer days that exceed ozone standards has declined from 95 days in 1990 to 15 days in 2015; a strong downward trend that is expected to continue over the next several years. In fact, the District expects that the County and region will meet federal ozone standards years ahead of mandated deadlines. However, so long as the region continues to grow and remains vulnerable to episodic poor air quality events from major wildfires, we will have to remain vigilant to ensure we continue to take every opportunity to improve air quality.

In support of this, the District has implemented several very successful and innovative programs within the county to reduce air pollutants that impact our health, environment, and local economy. These include:

- A focused effort to reduce emissions from Union Pacific’s Roseville Rail Yard.
- On-going support for activities that will utilize forest woody biomass wastes to fuel electricity generation and reduce wildfire size and severity.

- An annual Clean Air Grant Incentive Program that since 2001 has locally invested over \$16 million dollars in projects throughout the County to reduce an estimated 1,207 tons of smog forming and particulate emissions.
- Requiring the use of the most stringent emission control equipment on major stationary sources, which means less pollution coming out of the stack.

Although Placer County received a poor ranking, the efforts made by the District, local businesses and our sister agencies throughout the region have resulted in real, tangible improvements in air quality despite sharp increases in population and vehicle miles traveled; and through the continued implementation of successful local emission reductions strategies, our air quality future looks bright!