

AIR QUALITY

By the Numbers

Even if the breeze outside your home feels fresh, you may be inhaling harmful contaminants: More than 40 percent of Americans reside in places where pollution often renders air too dangerous to breathe. Here's what's sullyng our atmosphere and how you can protect it—along with your health. by BARBARA BRODY



30–45

Percent of people in urban North America who live within 0.3 miles of a highway or other busy road.

84

Number of potentially deadly contaminants—including arsenic, mercury, and formaldehyde—that are spewed into the air by coal-fired power plants, which burn the fossil fuel to generate electricity. “It’s a huge problem on the East Coast and in the Midwest,” says Nolen. Cut back by buying energy-efficient appliances.

2 million

Number of people worldwide who die annually as a result of air pollution, per a new *Environmental Research Letters* study.

205

Number of “orange” air quality alert days for ozone in Los Angeles between 2009 and 2011—meaning levels were elevated enough to make many kids, seniors, and asthmatics (who are more sensitive to pollution) feel ill. Most blame goes to port traffic and the number of vehicles on the road, says Janice Nolen, director of the American Lung Association State of the Air 2013 report. Plus, the city is geographically in a “bowl,” so smog often gets trapped.

32 million

Number of children who live in counties that got a failing grade for at least one pollutant. Kids are among the most vulnerable to air-related health problems because their lungs are still developing.

0

Number of days the four cleanest American cities—Bismarck, ND; Cape Coral–Fort Myers, FL; Palm Bay–Melbourne–Titusville, FL; and Rapid City, SD—were marred by unhealthy levels of ozone.

60 minutes

Time of exposure to high ozone levels that research has linked to developing an irregular heartbeat. Longer periods in this environment increase the risk of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and heart failure.

Take Action

Protect your lungs with these smart steps.

➔ **Check the air quality forecast for your area at airnow.gov.**

If it’s a bad air day, limit outdoor time as much as possible—especially during the afternoon when ozone levels peak.

➔ **Exercise away from high-traffic areas.**

You breathe more heavily and inhale more air when you’re active, so you’ll want to avoid congestion.

➔ **Limit your use of fireplaces and wood-burning stoves.**

They’re a huge source of particle pollution, says Nolen.

➔ **Turn off your car.**

Idling your engine spews excess pollution into a concentrated area.