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  - News
  - Today's Paper
  - Sports
  - Classifieds
  - Shopping
  - Services
  - Entertainment
  - Visitor In
- [Advertising Info](#) [About Us](#) [Contact Us](#) [Feedback](#) [Site Index](#) [Privacy Policy](#)

- News
- War on Terror
- Metro
- North County
- State/The West
- Nation
- Mexico
- World
- Business
- Technology
- Science
- Politics
- Military
- Education
- Travel
- Solutions
- Special Reports
- Features
- Weather
- Forums
- Opinion
- Columnists
- U-T Daily Paper
- U-T Email Edition
- Archives
- AP Wire

## Air pollution spikes in California despite recent downturn

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

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LOS ANGELES – California has endured its worst air pollution season in several years, reversing what had been years of improvements to the state's air quality.

All of Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties have experienced 49 days when ozone readings exceeded federal standards, according to data collected by the South Coast Air Quality Management District. That is a 36 percent increase over last year.

Experts said smog levels were up across the state as a result of hot, dry weather along with a series of wildfires that polluted the air over formerly smog-free places such as Death Valley National Park and the eastern Sierra Nevada.

Los Angeles, however, and the southern part of Los Angeles County fared better, recording zero days this year when ozone readings exceeded federal standards. Readings that exceed federal standards can cause headaches, nausea or shortness of breath.

The worst air pollution in Southern California was reported in the Santa Clarita Valley, which suffered 32 days of unhealthy ozone. Other smog hotspots in Southern California were Crestline and Redlands, with 23 days, Banning with 14, and Rubidoux and Glendora with 12.

"Smog has been very noticeable this year. It makes our life more difficult," said Rick Winsman, president of the Santa Clarita Valley Chamber of Commerce.

In the Sacramento area, air violated the federal ozone standard on 10 days – more than three times as many violations as last year, officials report.

"High heat, calm winds, temperatures over 100 degrees for days on



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end. That is the perfect recipe for smog stew, and that's what we had this year," said Kerry Shearer, spokesman for the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District.

Many cautioned the overall jump in ozone days does not signal a long-term trend, saying weather has played a large role.

"I don't think we're losing our way. We are on target, but you're going to see year-to-year fluctuations," said AQMD's chief, Barry Wallerstein.

Others worried California may be slipping. "I think California is backsliding on air quality," said V. John White, a Sierra Club lobbyist and air quality consultant in Sacramento.

"We're always at risk of growth eating up our gains," he said. "There's a complacency – too many victory laps. But the self-congratulatory phase is over, and we need to get back to work."

A decade ago, weather conditions similar to those that occurred this summer would have produced nearly 150 unhealthy days. And, days of bad ozone are down about 65 percent since 1992.

Scientists also reported that smog is occurring farther and farther inland each year. The worst smog in the Sacramento area occurred in Placer County, while in the Los Angeles region, the ozone hotspot has shifted eastward to Glendora and other foothill communities over the past two decades.

In the San Joaquin Valley, 33 days of unhealthy ozone were reported – up 38 percent from the previous year. Parlier, a small town southeast of Fresno, reported the most ozone days and one of the highest readings of smog in the state at almost 40 percent over the federal limit.

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