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Media contact

[Seth Preston](#)

Mobile: 360-724-8766

Air quality in local counties continues to show wildfire smoke impacts, according to new national report

Good news: Ozone levels continue to remain healthy

Wildfire smoke that blanketed local counties at times with harmful fine particles in recent summers impacted local air quality, according to the [American Lung Association](#)'s 25th annual national ["State of the Air" report](#).

Like counties throughout Washington, Whatcom County air quality received an "F" grade for 24-hour particle pollution because of wildfire smoke impacts again in this year's report. The report includes data from the years 2020-2022.

Skagit County received a "C" grade for 24-hour pollution, but data collection issues affected that result. [Northwest Clean Air Agency](#)'s data shows Skagit County also experienced high levels of wildfire smoke during the three summers covered by the report and likely would have received an "F" also.

The report only uses data from specific kinds of monitors, so it does not include NWCAA data for Island County and some area cities. NWCAA data shows similar air quality trends in those areas.

The American Lung Association provides two different grades for particulate (smoke) pollution. The 24-hour grade is based on the smokiest days; the annual grade is based on how much smoke is in the air as a yearly average.

"Our area has experienced smoke events in recent summers. Smoke has impacted all Washington's counties, some more than others, and caused poor scores for daily averages," said Mark Buford, NWCAA executive director.

"We already believe this could be an intense wildfire season – [drought conditions](#) are being seen all over the state, including here in Northwest Washington. And we saw wildfires start in Skagit and Whatcom counties last weekend. We're grateful the [Washington Department of Natural Resources](#) and area responders acted quickly to minimize potential impacts," Buford said.

"But this shows it's going to be especially important this year for *everyone* to do whatever they can to limit the possibility of sparking a wildfire that produces smoke pollution," he added.

Buford stressed people who live and work in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties

generally enjoy good air quality.

“We score well for year-round air quality, even with those bad days of wildfire smoke factored in. It’s very important to keep that in mind and to realize low 24-hour grades link directly to those harmful wildfire smoke events.

“Local air quality would be in the ‘A’ range if we factored the wildfire smoke out of our data,” Buford said.

However, Buford emphasized, the reality is residents felt the impacts of wildfire smoke in recent years – and likely will into the foreseeable future.

The “State of the Air” report takes a nationwide look at particle and ozone pollution – two common, widespread air pollutants that are dangerous to public health.

The report uses data from official air quality monitors submitted by air quality agencies and estimates respiratory disease rates to provide a comparative picture of risks to people’s health. The report only uses data from specific kinds of monitors, so it does not include NWCAA data for Island County and some area cities. NWCAA data shows similar air quality trends in those areas.

Among the report’s conclusions: Skagit and Whatcom counties received overall “A” grades for ozone pollution, ranking them among the cleanest U.S. counties for ozone.

NWCAA works with local health officials, fire marshals, fire districts, and forest management agencies as they try to reduce wildfire risk and help people cope with wildfire smoke.

The agency continues working to protect and improve air quality through regulating pollution from industrial emissions, illegal burning, and other sources.

“We can all do more each and every day to protect the air we breathe. But we also greatly appreciate all the people and businesses who work hard to improve and protect our area’s air,” Buford said.

NWCAA has eight air quality monitoring locations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. Go to the [Air Quality Center](#) on our website, <https://nwcleanairwa.gov>, for information.

NWCAA also provides a variety of resources – tips, videos, fact sheets, and more – about how to prepare and deal with wildfire smoke on the website’s [Wildfire Smoke Information](#) page.

The Northwest Clean Air Agency is responsible for enforcing federal, state, and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources of air pollution, the agency provides services and information related to asbestos, indoor air quality, outdoor burning, woodstoves, and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at <https://nwcleanairwa.gov>.