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For Immediate Release

Lane County's "F" Air Quality Grade: What It Means, and What It Misses

LANE COUNTY, Ore.- The American Lung Association (ALA) recently gave Lane County an "F" for air quality in its annual State of the Air report. The Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA) takes that finding seriously and wants residents to understand the methodology behind the grade and what it means for their health.

Wildfire smoke is driving the grade

Lane County's air quality has steadily improved over the last 20 years when it comes to pollution from everyday sources like wood stoves and vehicles. That progress, however, is being overshadowed by the impact from smoke caused by severe wildfire seasons.

The American Lung Association grades metropolitan areas using the worst air quality readings recorded anywhere within that county. For the Eugene-Springfield metro area, that includes data from all eight of LRAPA's monitoring stations across the county, including the station in Oakridge.

Due to its location in a deep valley, local wood smoke, and frequent large wildfire events, Oakridge regularly experiences some of the worst particulate matter pollution levels in the county. In 2022, Oakridge residents faced 37 days of unhealthy air quality or worse due to wildfire smoke. That same year, Eugene-Springfield recorded only three days. That data, while critically impactful on Oakridge residents' health, shapes the grade assigned to the entire Eugene-Springfield region.

What the grade does, and doesn't, tell you.

"This grade reflects a real challenge. Wildfire smoke is the biggest threat to air quality in the Pacific Northwest, and Lane County residents have seen it firsthand," said Matt Sorensen, Public Affairs Manager for LRAPA. "Our focus is giving residents the information and tools they need to protect themselves from wildfire smoke, while we work to continue reducing the pollution sources we can control."

LRAPA agrees with the ALA that its methodology is applied consistently across the United States. However, LRAPA has raised concerns with the association that the approach may not fully reflect the geographic and environmental diversity of a county as large as Lane County, but those concerns have not led to changes in how grades are calculated.

The result is a regional grade that reflects the worst air quality recorded anywhere in Lane County. This data can significantly overshadow day-to-day air quality conditions experienced by those living in our most populated areas.

What LRAPA is doing about it.

Protecting air quality and public health is LRAPA's top priority. LRAPA continues to work with community partners to reduce air pollution, issue timely air quality advisories during wildfire events, and help residents understand and take proactive steps to protect their health when smoke is present.

If wildfire seasons continue to intensify, the health risks from wildfire smoke will remain a serious concern for Lane County residents, and so will a poor American Lung Association grade.

Residents can find current air quality conditions, health advisories, and protective actions at lrapa-or.gov or by calling **541-736-1056**.

LRAPA is the local air quality protection agency for Lane County, Oregon. The agency monitors air quality, enforces air pollution regulations, and works with community partners to protect public health and the environment.