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## Westchester receives failing grade for air quality

*Here's what business can do*



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The American Lung Association has released its 2009 State of the Air report, including analysis of ozone levels in each county in

New York. Westchester County received a failing grade – meaning there were too many days with unhealthy ozone levels.

The potential consequences of this rating for residents require attention and action.

According to the latest review by the National Research Council, ozone pollution can shorten a person's life span and lead to premature death. Other studies link ozone pollution to heart disease,

restricted fetal growth and respiratory disease – most commonly asthma.

The ingredients for ozone include nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons (commonly found in gases such as vehicle exhaust), heat and sunlight. The summer months are the most dangerous for this type of pollution.

Which groups are most at risk?

They are children, teens, senior citizens and people with asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other chronic health conditions.

"No one should be forced to breathe in dangerous and toxic emissions, especially those with lung diseases who are already struggling to breathe," said Michael Seilback, vice president for public policy and communications for the American Lung Association in New York.

So, as business leaders in the Westchester County community, what can we do to help our loved ones avoid another trip to the hospital or a missed day at summer camp?

Start with your morning commute. Vehicle exhaust – as mentioned before – is one of the major building blocks of ozone. If just 1 in 10 commuters in the New York metro area carpooled, worked from home or used public transit just once a week, there would be a reduction in emissions of ozone precursors of 5,100 tons each week. That's the weight equivalent of 2,600 standard-size sport utility vehicles.

Many businesses are finding ways to encourage employees to choose travel options that are smarter and cleaner for our air. Northern Westchester Hospital, for example, created a campaign for employees to join NuRide, a ride-sharing

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network. The hospital also offers a \$100 incentive for employees to walk to work, a guaranteed ride home for transit riders and a special parking lot for carpoolers.

These programs can take time to implement. But, there are things your business can do now. Clean Air NY ([cleanairny.org](http://cleanairny.org)), an initiative of the New York state Department of Transportation, lists these simple actions to take every day:

- **Bike, Walk or Use Public Transit.** Forgoing your car just one day a week for a year could save about 1,000 miles on the vehicle and \$500 in total driving costs. Just think of what you could do with that extra money, in addition to the health benefits of walking or biking.

- **Share a Ride.** Whenever possible, share a ride by carpooling or vanpooling to your destination. To find a carpool partner or vanpool, visit [nycommute.org](http://nycommute.org) or [511ny.org](http://511ny.org).

- **Access to Local Transportation Experts.** MetroPool ([www.metropool.com](http://www.metropool.com)) offers free commuter services to Westchester County businesses.

- **Stay informed.** Sign up to receive real-time updates on Air Quality Action Days - days when ozone levels are at their highest and most dangerous. Whenever possible, stay inside on Air Quality Action Days. Text AIR to 42269 or visit [cleanairny.org](http://cleanairny.org) to sign up to receive alerts.

I urge you – this week, next week and every week – to make these small changes and to help keep the air healthier and save lives. For more information on how your business can make a difference, visit [cleanairny.org/DoYourPart/Employers.aspx](http://cleanairny.org/DoYourPart/Employers.aspx)

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