

## Metro Vancouver air quality shows encouraging trend

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Peak levels of two significant air pollutants have shown a downward trend in some Metro Vancouver municipalities over recent years, according to a report released Thursday by the B.C. Lung Association.

The authors of the State of the Air 2008 report credit factors such as AirCare and the closure of oil refineries for drops in high levels of nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide in our air.

"We see some encouraging trends," said Dr. Ray Copes, a University of B.C. professor and director of environmental health services at the B.C. Centre for Disease Control.

However, Copes cautioned that further research is needed to determine whether overall air quality has improved. The report analysed only levels of pollutants over one-hour periods on particularly bad days, rather than broader averages.

Air pollution is linked to a variety of human health concerns, from premature birth and low birth weight to asthma and bronchiolitis, according to the report.

The study shows peak levels of nitrogen dioxide have decreased in Vancouver, Port Moody, South Burnaby and Chilliwack since 1993.

In the Fraser Valley, better vehicle-emission standards and AirCare inspections were big factors in the improvements, says the report, which was contributed to by several doctors including Copes.

Peak levels of sulphur dioxide were measured between 1993 and 2003, and were found to have dropped in Vancouver, Port Moody, South Burnaby and Prince George.

In Metro Vancouver, the report says, this is due to reductions of sulphur content in vehicle fuels, the shutting down of local refineries and reduced emissions from the cement industry. In Prince George, it's largely because of reductions in pulp mill emissions.

In contrast, however, annual averages of another air pollutant, ozone, have spiked since 1993 in Vancouver, South Burnaby, Hope, Kelowna and Prince George, a phenomenon Copes says is likely tied to "an overall hemispheric increase of ozone levels.

Although these numbers - which authors call a "preliminary overview" - look positive, and although B.C.'s air pollution levels are "pretty good for Canada," Copes said further emission controls would help.

He said the health costs of outdoor air pollution - estimated to be \$85 million per year - will continue because of the quantity of toxins aging residents have been exposed to in their lifetimes.

"We're paying health costs today for some of the emissions of yesterday," Copes said.

Download the full report at [vancouver.sun.com](http://vancouver.sun.com) to see breakdowns of air pollutant levels in your community.

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