

# Breathin' uneasy on LI

■ American Lung Association gives Suffolk an F for elevated levels of deadly ozone but awards it and Nassau C's for particulate air pollution

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For the ninth time in a row, Suffolk County has received a grade of F for elevated ozone levels, but Nassau and Suffolk have improved enough to achieve passing grades of C when it comes to sooty, particulate forms of air pollution.

In its annual State of the Air Report, the American Lung Association has found that Suffolk County has some of the worst air quality in New York based on the number of days when the state found that ozone levels peaked. All told, it was only 17 days, but experts say ozone — or smog — can be deadly.

Suffolk wasn't alone. Three other New York counties, Chautauqua, Richmond and Westchester, received failing grades due to elevated ozone.

"These failing grades mean far too many New Yorkers are breathing unhealthy air," said Michael Seilback, senior policy director at the association's offices in Hauppauge. "Depending on where you live, the air you breathe ranges from good to bad to downright ugly."

Even though particulate pollution is monitored in Nassau, ozone is not. Despite the lack of an ozone detector, "Air pollution doesn't care about county boundaries or county borders," Seilback said. "Weather patterns go west to east. So some of the air in Suffolk probably moved in from Nassau."

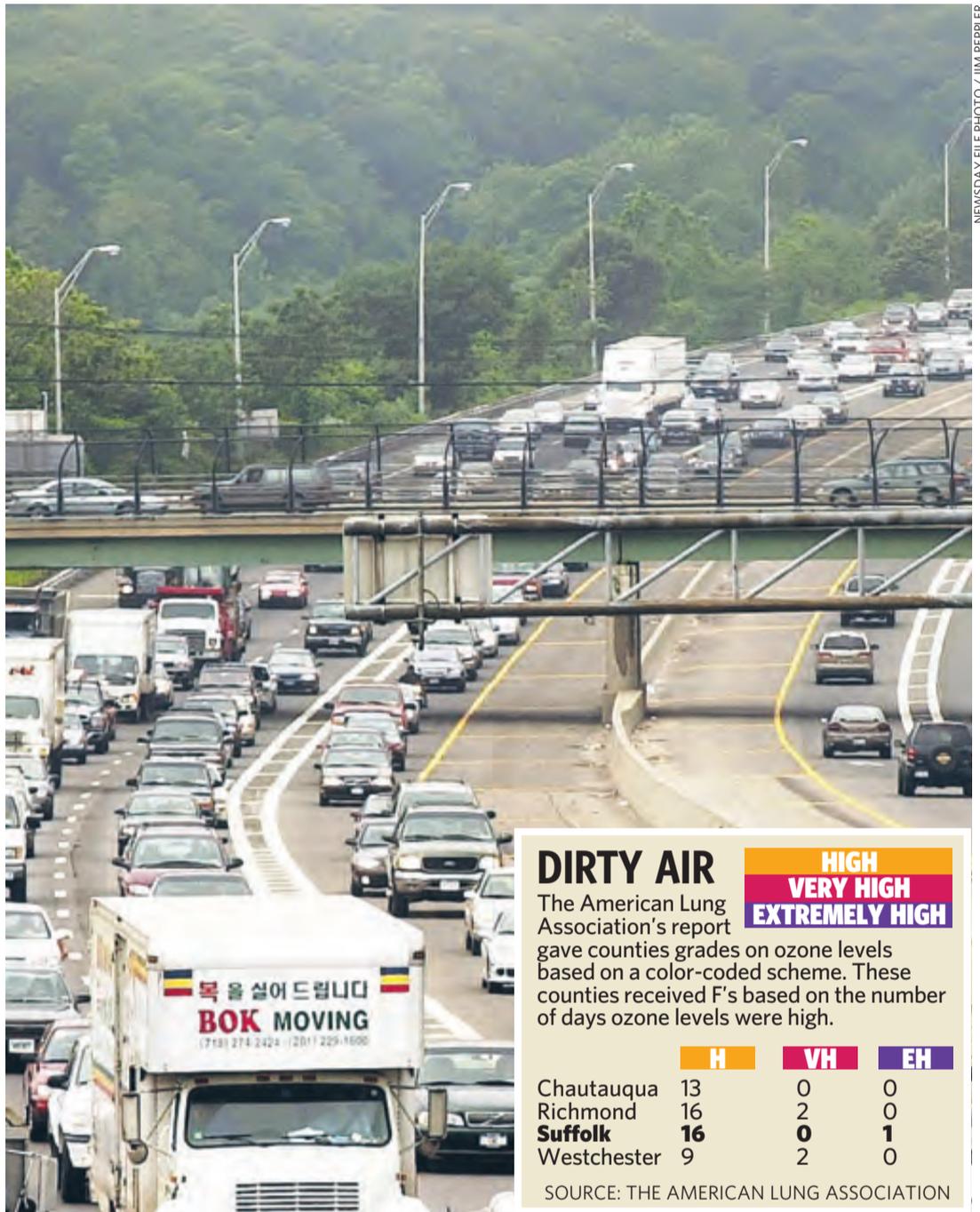
Suffolk isn't entirely blameless. Vehicular traffic, combustion from home-heating oil, and factory and power plant emissions add to problematic air quality.

Last year, both Nassau and Suffolk received D's for particle pollution, but this year they improved to C's.

Janice Nolen, senior author of the report, which assesses air quality nationwide, said other parts of the country fared worse.

"Some areas improved significantly while others have actually worsened; about 125 million Americans live in areas where the air placed their health at risk," she said.

Dr. Norman Edelman, the lung association's chief medical officer, said air pollutants may explain lung cancer diagnosed in people who've never smoked. Pollutants, he added, exacerbate a number of lung disorders and



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## DIRTY AIR

The American Lung Association's report gave counties grades on ozone levels based on a color-coded scheme. These counties received F's based on the number of days ozone levels were high.

	H	VH	EH
Chautauqua	13	0	0
Richmond	16	2	0
<b>Suffolk</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
Westchester	9	2	0

SOURCE: THE AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION

heart disease.

"During high pollution periods people with heart disease tend to have heart attacks," Edelman said, adding that science increasingly has begun to appreciate a link between pollutants and arterial damage.

"Air pollution not only makes people sicker, it kills," Edelman said.

Even though air quality has improved, pollutants remain ubiquitous. Long Island is upwind from coal-fired power plants in the Midwest that produce electricity along a vast grid. Coal is

one of the dirtiest fuels, producing tremendous amounts of particulate matter.

Outdated power plants on Long Island are also a concern. "In Suffolk, they are in Northport and Port Jefferson, both of which are extremely old. We have been calling for these plants to be repowered," Seilback said.

"There's the Barrett power plant in Island Park," Seilback said of one in Nassau. "That's another one of these very dirty, old power plants."

Air quality data in the report

is from the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, which monitors pollutants statewide. Ozone detectors are in Babylon and Riverhead; the particulate monitor is at Lawrence High School in Cedarhurst. The report involves monitoring conducted between 2004 and 2006.

Homeowners can help reduce pollution by choosing biofuel over conventional heating oil, Seilback said. "Governor Pateron and the state legislature just passed a tax credit for homeowners who choose to do this."

# Rate cut, then a wait and see

REUTERS

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve lowered U.S. interest rates by a modest quarter percentage point yesterday and hinted the move could be the last in a series meant to buffer the economy from a credit crunch and housing downturn.

The Fed, however, kept its options open and nodded to ongoing financial market stress, tight credit and the deepening housing contraction.

The central bank's action takes the bellwether federal

fund rate, which banks charge each other for overnight loans, to 2 percent, the lowest since December 2004. It was the seventh cut in a campaign that has brought the key lending rate down by 3.25 percentage points since mid-September.

In response to the Fed move, commercial banks quickly announced they were cutting their prime lending rate by a quarter point to 5 percent. That would mean cheaper credit on business and consumer loans tied to the prime.

In addition to citing the "sub-

stantial" rate reductions now in place, the Fed took note of rising prices for energy and other commodities. It also shifted away from a promise to "act in a timely manner" to a softer commitment to "act as needed."

Taken together, analysts said, the changes suggested policy-makers were now willing to sit back to see if the economy, which some think may be in recession, picks up speed.

The Fed is "basically telling you that unless their outlook for the real economy deteriorates further, they will stay at 2 per-

cent," said Mohamed El-Erian, co-chief executive of Pacific Investment Management Co.

President George W. Bush Tuesday said the U.S. economy faced a "tough time," a point underscored yesterday by a report that showed U.S. gross domestic product expanded at a slim 0.6 percent annual rate in the first quarter.

While the growth rate was a bit stronger than economists had expected, it reflected a buildup in inventories that may weigh on the economy in coming months.



BLOOMBERG NEWS PHOTO

The new interest rate is the lowest since December 2004.