



# Hawaii's Air Quality Earns a "D" Due to New Year's Fireworks Orgy

Lung Association's "Safe Haven" Program Offers Advice,  
Respite from the Worst Air Pollution of the Year

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HONOLULU, HI – For 364 days of the year, Hawaii's air is virtually free of particulate pollution thanks to a low industrial base and thousands of miles of fresh air surrounding the state. But on that other day, residents breathe a deadly mix of pollutants.

Fireworks on New Year's Eve explode so much junk into the air that the American Lung Association (ALA) awards Hawaii a grade of "D" for air particle pollution for the entire year. "It's like someone who drives wonderfully 364 days a year but smashes the car every New Year's eve," says Sterling Yee, president of the American Lung Association of Hawaii (ALAH). "We wouldn't tolerate that in our own families, and Hawaii's *ohana* shouldn't have to tolerate it either."

Yee stressed that Hawaii's annual New Year's Eve fireworks celebration is a serious public health concern. The ALA would not give the state a "D" for the entire year if it were otherwise.

"Particulate matter is by far the most deadly of the widespread air pollutants," Yee said. "It literally kills tens of thousands of Americans each year, with some estimates placing the toll as high as 60,000 premature deaths annually. Most of those deaths are from heart attacks and stroke, but a good number are from lung cancer."

The particulate matter that fouls Hawaii's air at New Year's can be solids, especially exploded fireworks, and dust, ash or soot, but it also can be liquid aerosols or solids suspended in liquid mixtures. They can be of different sizes, with the smallest able to lodge deep in the lungs where they can do serious damage.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last week announced new national standards for particulate pollution in response to a lawsuit filed by the ALA in 2003. These new standards become the goal for every state and county to reach across the nation and occur only once a decade.

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Yee said the new standards are disappointing in that they did not even meet the recommendations of EPA's own independent advisory committee of experts on the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC). He said the EPA has never before picked a standard that allowed more pollution than the CASAC recommended.

Yee said the debate will continue over whether stricter standards are needed, but regardless of the debate's outcome, standards alone won't change Hawaii's air quality. He said the greatest impact on improving that quality would be reduced fireworks use by the state's citizens around New Year's Eve.

Yee said ALAH joins with others, including the Honolulu Fire Department, in urging restraint during the New Year's celebration. He said the best advice the ALAH can provide for Hawaii residents who are concerned about their health on New Year's Eve is:

- Avoid people who have colds and other lung infections if possible. Wash your hands thoroughly each time you've been out in the public.
- Avoid second-hand smoke. Ask your friends and family members who smoke to "take it outside" out of concern for your health.
- Start drinking fluids to loosen mucus and help you cough. Warm beverages tend to work best.
- Put your air conditioner or air purifier in good working order by changing filters if possible.
- Check with your physician before New Year's Eve if you feel you may be especially vulnerable this year, and obtain medication in advance.
- On the big night, stay indoors and close your windows and doors. Avoid physical exertion and get plenty of rest. Use a paper, gauze or non-toxic dust mask if it seems to help. Masks are available at the ALAH Honolulu office at 245 N. Kukui Street, Ste. 100 and from various retail outlets on all islands. Masks are also available at Kuakini Medical Center at the pulmonary lab. Please use masks with caution. If breathing is exacerbated, discontinue use.

Another option to avoid New Year's Eve smoke is to take advantage of the reduced rates at the Turtle Bay Resort. Reduced rates are offered from December 31, 2005 to January 2, 2006 to all who mention the ALAH when making reservations.

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