The New York City Community Air Survey:

Neighborhood Air Quality 2008-2020

Summary

In 2007, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) established the New York City Community Air Survey (NYCCAS), the **largest ongoing urban air monitoring program** of any U.S. City. NYCCAS, which began collecting data in December 2008, is a collaboration between the Health Department and Queens College of the City University of New York and provides data to:

- Help inform OneNYC, the City's sustainability plan
- Track changes in air quality over time
- Estimate exposures for health research
- Inform the public about local topics, such as: air quality in the time of COVID-19 (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/covidair/), recent air quality

improvements (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/breatheeasy/index.html), car-free zones (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/aqts/index.html), (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/AQsnapshots/Index.html) changes in the sources of air pollution (https://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/aq-cooking/index.html), unique studies conducted in New York City (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/AQsnapshots/Index.html)and differences in air quality and health impacts across NYC neighborhoods (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/aq2/index.html).

This report:

- Provides a summary of key findings (#Findings), the air monitoring program (#Methods), monitoring site selection (#Sites), and descriptions of the pollutants measured (#Pollutant_Description)
- Describes the trends in air pollutant levels (#Pollutant_Sources) from **more than a decade of data** between winter 2008-2009 through fall 2020 for fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), nitric oxide (NO), black carbon (BC), wintertime sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and summertime ozone (O_3)
- Presents maps of neighborhood air pollution levels (#Pollutant_Maps) by year
- Identifies the local sources (#Pollutant_Predictors) that contribute to high levels of these pollutants in New York City neighborhoods

Key Findings

In 2020, New York City and surrounding communities implemented measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. As a result, we saw dramatic changes in air pollution in some neighborhoods and smaller changes in others.

Overall, the levels in Spring through Summer 2020 were lower than previous years. For more information about these changes in air quality, see Air Quality during COVID-19 (https://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/covidair2/index.html)

Citywide, annual average levels of four key pollutants have gone down between the first year of monitoring, 2009, and the most recent year of data, 2020.

Fine particles ($PM_{2.5}$) -43%

Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2)	-39%
Nitric Oxide (NO)	-56%
Sulfer Dioxide (SO_2)	-98%

Air quality improved significantly after the local regulations required building owners to convert to cleaner heating oils by 2015.

These heating oils were a major source of SO_2 in New York City. In 2020, only five of our 60 core sites detected any SO_2, and the levels at those sites were similar to SO_2 levels measured on Whiteface Mountain in the Adirondack Mountains, demonstrating the success of the clean heating oil requirements.

Air quality changes with location

$PM_{2.5}$, NO_2, NO, and BC are highest in:

- Areas with higher density of commercial cooking grills and charbroilers
- Industrial areas
- Areas of higher traffic density
- Areas with higher building density

Ozone levels are highest in:

- The outer boroughs
- Areas that are downwind of high NO_X (oxides of nitrogen) emissions
- Areas with fewer combustion emissions

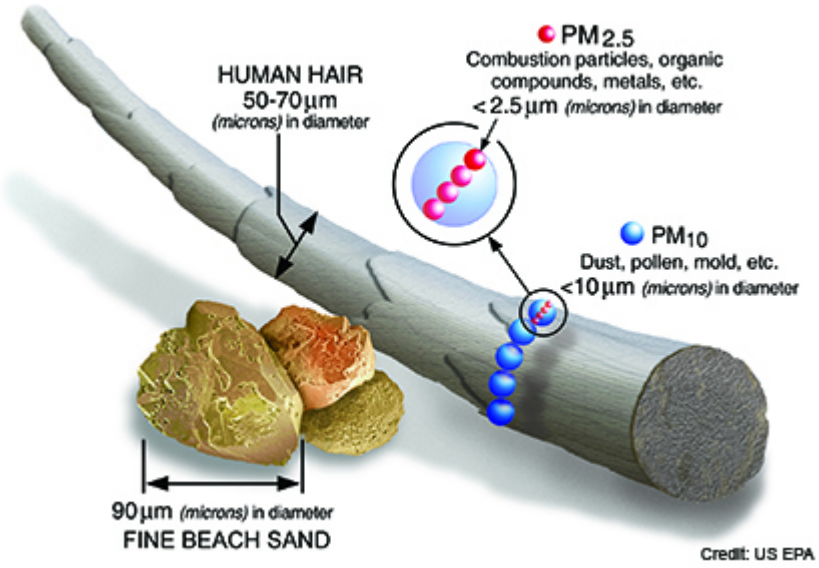
Pollutants Measured by NYCCAS: Health Effects and Sources

Fine Particles

Fine particles ($PM_{2.5}$) are tiny airborne solid and liquid particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter. $PM_{2.5}$ is the most harmful urban air pollutant. It is small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, which can worsen lung and heart disease and lead to hospital admissions and premature deaths.

$PM_{2.5}$ can either be directly emitted or formed in the atmosphere from other pollutants. Fuel combustion in vehicles, boilers in buildings, power plants, construction equipment, marine vessels and commercial cooking are all common sources of $PM_{2.5}$.

Up to 40% of the $PM_{2.5}$ in New York City's air comes from sources in areas upwind from the city, such as coal-burning power plants in the Midwest.



Black Carbon

Nitrogen Dioxide and Nitric Oxide

Ozone

Sulfur Dioxide

NYCCAS Methods

The Health Department designed NYCCAS to understand how average air pollution levels vary from place to place within New York City. NYCCAS staff mount samplers on street light poles 10 to 12 feet off the ground along residential and commercial streets and in parks. The monitors use a small battery-powered pump and filters to collect air samples. Our air samplers are deployed at each NYCCAS site once each season and collect data for a two-week period. Samples are collected in all seasons for NO, NO_2, $PM_{2.5}$ and BC; in the summer for O_3; and in the winter for SO_2. For more details on sample collection methods, see Appendix 1 (PDF) (/nyccas2021v9/sites/default/files/NYCCAS-appendix/Appendix1.pdf).

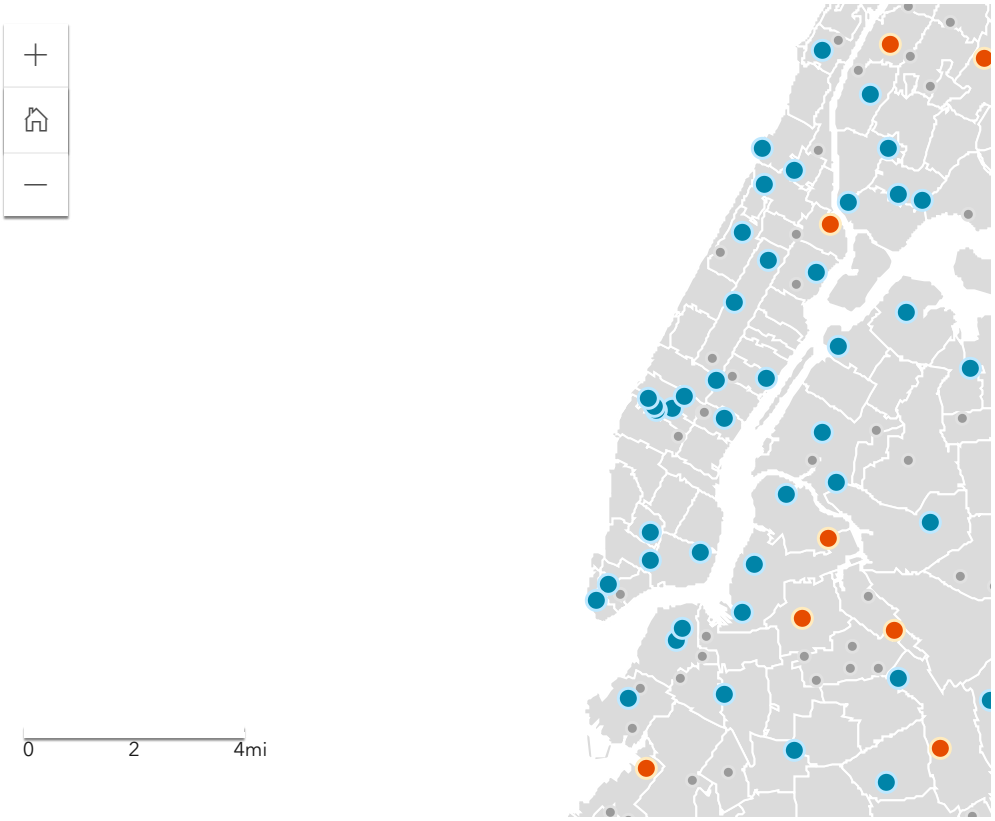
The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation also has a network of 19 air quality monitors in New York City that are required by the Federal government, but they are mounted on building roofs. We placed our air samplers at street level to measure pollution where people spend time, and where traffic-related pollution levels are usually higher.

NYCCAS has also deployed a limited number of monitors that can measure $PM_{2.5}$ levels in real time. These monitors allow us to monitor air pollution as it changes based on the time of day, weather or due to local pollution sources, such as heavy-duty trucks. The data from these monitors is available here: Real-Time Air Quality (https://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/AQHub/realtime.html).

NYCCAS Sites

The monitoring locations represent a wide variety of New York City environments – sidewalks, busy streets, parks and quiet neighborhood roads. Most of the sites (80%) were chosen by the Health Department at random to ensure representation in all types of neighborhoods, including residential, commercial and industrial areas. The remaining sites were selected because they are near potentially high-emission locations that were not captured in the random assignment. These include Times Square, the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the entrance to the Holland Tunnel. The locations vary in tree canopy and in

the density of traffic and buildings. The number of sites has changed over the years as we have learned about air quality in our city. In 2020, we monitored 78 routine locations and an additional 15 sites in low-income neighborhoods that would benefit from additional monitoring to understand potential sources of emissions. We refer to these as Environmental Justice Sites (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/AQsnapshots/Index.html#section5) on the map.



Routine Site **Environmental Justice Site** **Retired Site**

Pollutant Maps

Since it is impossible to sample the air in every location in New York City, we monitor representative sites to determine how pollution levels vary in relation to traffic, buildings, trees and other neighborhood factors. We use NYCCAS monitoring data along with data on land use, traffic, building emissions and other neighborhood factors around the

monitors to build a land-use regression (LUR) model. We then used the associations from these models to estimate the seasonal average air pollution levels at locations across the city, including places where no NYCCAS measurements were collected. For more details on emission source data, see Appendix 1 (PDF) (/nyccas2021v9/sites/default/files/NYCCAS-appendix/Appendix1.pdf). For more details on the analysis methods, see NYCCAS Scientific Publications (https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-publications/air-quality-nyc-community-air-survey.page#nyccas-pubs).

In the maps below, you can select a pollutant to see how air pollution is distributed throughout the city and how it has changed over time. The City's air quality changed significantly during the spring and summer of 2020 and resulted in lower annual average values, especially for $PM_{2.5}$, as can be seen in the maps below. Winter and summer average maps for BC, NO_2, NO and $PM_{2.5}$ are available in Appendix 2 (PDF) (/nyccas2022/sites/default/files/NYCCAS-appendix/Appendix2.pdf). Due to delays in processing, 2020 BC results are not shown; this report will be updated as soon as they are available.

Pollutant Trends over Time by Sources

Since monitoring began in winter 2008-2009 in New York City, we have seen a decrease in most of the air pollutants we measure. However, the concentrations of NO_2, NO and $PM_{2.5}$ continue to be higher in industrial zones with more diesel truck traffic, neighborhoods with large numbers of restaurants, and areas of higher traffic and building density. Air pollution changes not only by neighborhood, but also by season. Some pollutants are highest in certain seasons of the year because of either weather patterns or emissions sources. For example, O_3 is produced when NO_X and other airborne pollutants react in the presence of heat and sunlight. Therefore, we only monitor O_3 in the summer when direct sunlight is highest and days are longer.

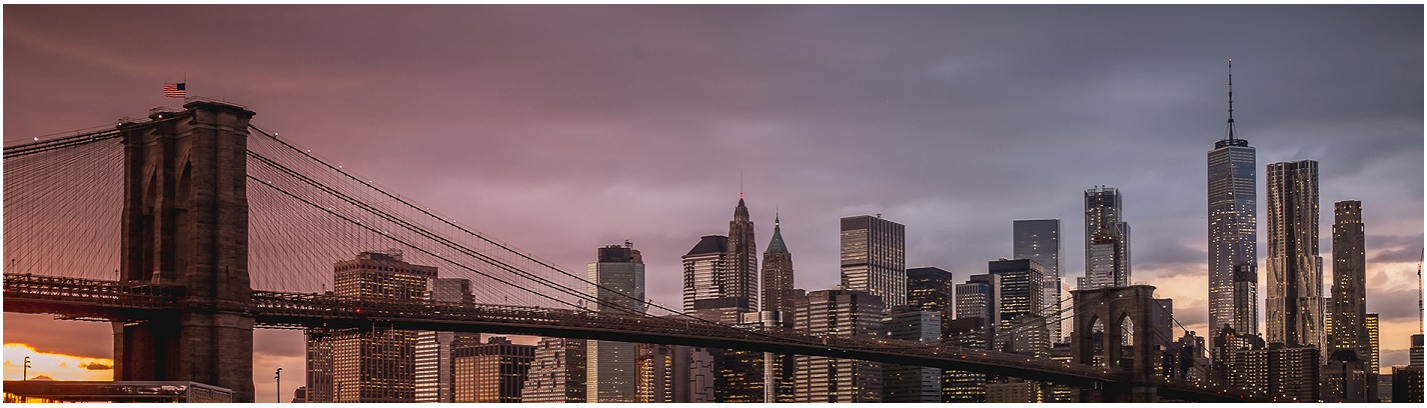
The figure below illustrates how the levels of each air pollutant change by season from winter 2008-2009 to fall 2020. We break out locations with high, medium and low densities of the most common sources of each. Since winter 2017-18 there have been too few sites with SO_2 values above the detection limit for us to include it in this chart. SO_2 levels have gone down dramatically since Local Law 43 of 2010 (https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dep/downloads/pdf/air/local-law-43-biodiesel-fuel-requirement.pdf) prohibited the burning of heavy fuel oil (No. 6) in New York City buildings.

Pollutant Predictors

NYCCAS data were analyzed using a land-use regression (LUR) model. LUR models estimate associations among pollution levels, average traffic, building emissions, land use and other neighborhood factors around the monitoring sites. The pollution sources that contribute most to differences in concentrations of NO, NO_2, BC, and $PM_{2.5}$ across NYC are listed in the table below. SO_2 is now so low in NYC that it is not possible to build a LUR model for the most recent years of data.

Fuel used to provide heat and hot water in buildings has become significantly cleaner under state and local regulations requiring use of cleaner burning fuels. As a result, commercial charbroiling and grilling operations have become a more important source of $PM_{2.5}$ emissions over the past several years due to state and local regulations mandating cleaner burning fuels for building heat and hot water. The number of commercial cooking charbroilers and grills in an area now explains $PM_{2.5}$ differences among neighborhoods better than building emissions. For more information on these changes, please see Tracking changes in New York City's sources of air pollution (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/aq-cooking/index.html).

Conclusion



This report underscores the importance of emissions reduction efforts over the past decade and highlights the continued need to reduce emissions citywide. The City's sustainability plan, OneNYC (http://www1.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/index.html), and its roadmap to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 80x50 (http://www1.nyc.gov/site/sustainability/codes/80x50.page), have already and will continue to improve air quality, providing important public health benefits to all New Yorkers. These strategies and measures include:

- Transitioning the City's fleet to more efficient, less polluting heavy-duty vehicles, such as trash trucks and school buses
- Reducing motor vehicle use by shifting to more sustainable modes of transportation
- Creating more efficient freight networks and expanding truck retrofit and replacement programs
- Continuing to reduce fossil fuel combustion in buildings

Additionally, reducing emissions from other widely distributed sources of pollution, such as BC and $PM_{2.5}$ from commercial charbroiling, will contribute to improved air quality in the future.

More Information:

- Appendix 1 (PDF) (/nyccas2021v9/sites/default/files/NYCCAS-appendix/Appendix1.pdf) : Sampling Methodology and Data Sources for Emissions Indicators.
- Appendix 2 (PDF) (/nyccas2022/sites/default/files/NYCCAS-appendix/Appendix2.pdf) : Seasonal Average Pollutant Maps.
- Appendix 3 (PDF) (/nyccas2022/sites/default/files/NYCCAS-appendix/Appendix3.pdf) : Community District Average Pollution Levels
- NYCCAS Air Quality Data Hub (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/AQHub/index.html)
- Environment & Health Data Portal (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/publictracking.aspx) : Neighborhood-level data and neighborhood air quality reports
- The Public Health Impacts of $PM_{2.5}$ from Traffic Air Pollution data story. (http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Traffic/index.html)
- NYCCAS Air Pollution Rasters on NYC OpenData (https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Environment/NYCCAS-Air-Pollution-Rasters/q68s-8qxv).
- New York Community Air Survey: past reports (http://www.nyc.gov/health/nyccas)

Directory of City Agencies (https://www1.nyc.gov/nyc-resources/agencies.page)
Contact NYC Government (https://www1.nyc.gov/home/contact-us.page)
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