

Suffolk air quality gets 'F'

American Lung Assn. again cites high ozone levels

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The American Lung Association has given Suffolk County a failing grade for poor air quality, ranking it among the worst air in the state because of an excessive number of days with high levels of ozone, the key gaseous component of smog.

The lung association tagged Suffolk with an F grade in its annual State of the Air Report, which assesses air quality throughout New York and elsewhere in the nation. Nassau County was not assessed because there are no air qual-

ity monitors within its borders. Suffolk has two, one in Babylon and another in Riverhead, lung association officials said Tuesday.

"In this report, we look at two types of air pollution: one is ozone, and the other is particulates," said Janice E. Nolen, assistant vice president for national policy for the lung association, and lead author of the report.

Nolen defined particulates as supersmall "bits" that are part of the airstream. These deadly flecks are about one-thirtieth the diameter of a human hair and are also called particle pollution. They emerge from coal-fired power plants, diesel emissions, wildfires and wood-burning devices. These fine particles are capable of breaching the body's defenses to invade the

bloodstream causing cardiovascular and pulmonary harm, she said.

Suffolk received a grade of A for low levels of this type of contaminant, the report showed.

The county, however, had 23 high ozone days, according to figures in the report. Ozone also was a problem last year for the county when the American Lung Association gave Suffolk an F.

Scientists have divided ozone into two types — good and bad. Stratospheric ozone, which naturally shields the planet from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays, is the good form. The bad is ground-level ozone created by chemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen — NOx molecules — and volatile organic compounds, known as VOC. The reactions between these two

occur in the presence of sunlight.

"Ozone can literally kill you," Nolen said, referring to reams of scientific data that have shown how the pollutant can worsen asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Ozone also underlies heart attacks and premature death, Nolen and other experts said during a news briefing Tuesday morning.

Suffolk's population of about 1.49 million, the report revealed, has a significant number of high-risk individuals, including about 29,000 children with asthma; more than 112,000 adults with asthma; 63,000 adults with COPD, and 875 people with lung cancer.

The American Lung Association's 2018 report covers air quality in 2014, 2015 and 2016 and marks the 19th year the or-

ganization has analyzed the concentration of pollutants in the environment. Lung association officials said 2016 was one of the hottest years on record and blamed climate change for the excess heat, which helped drive rising levels of ozone.

Michael Seilback, an association vice president in Hauppauge, said with reports consistently giving Suffolk grades of F for ozone pollution, it was time that measures were put in place to solve the problem.

"If my kids came home with an F or a D on a report card, we would agree that more work would have to be done," Seilback said.

He also bemoaned proposed rollbacks on federal clean air standards by the current Environmental Protection Agency.

IRS grants extra day to file after site crashes

The Associated Press

Americans are getting an extra day to file their taxes after key elements of the IRS website crashed on deadline day.

The IRS said that individuals or businesses with a filing or payment due Tuesday now have until midnight Wednesday to complete the task.

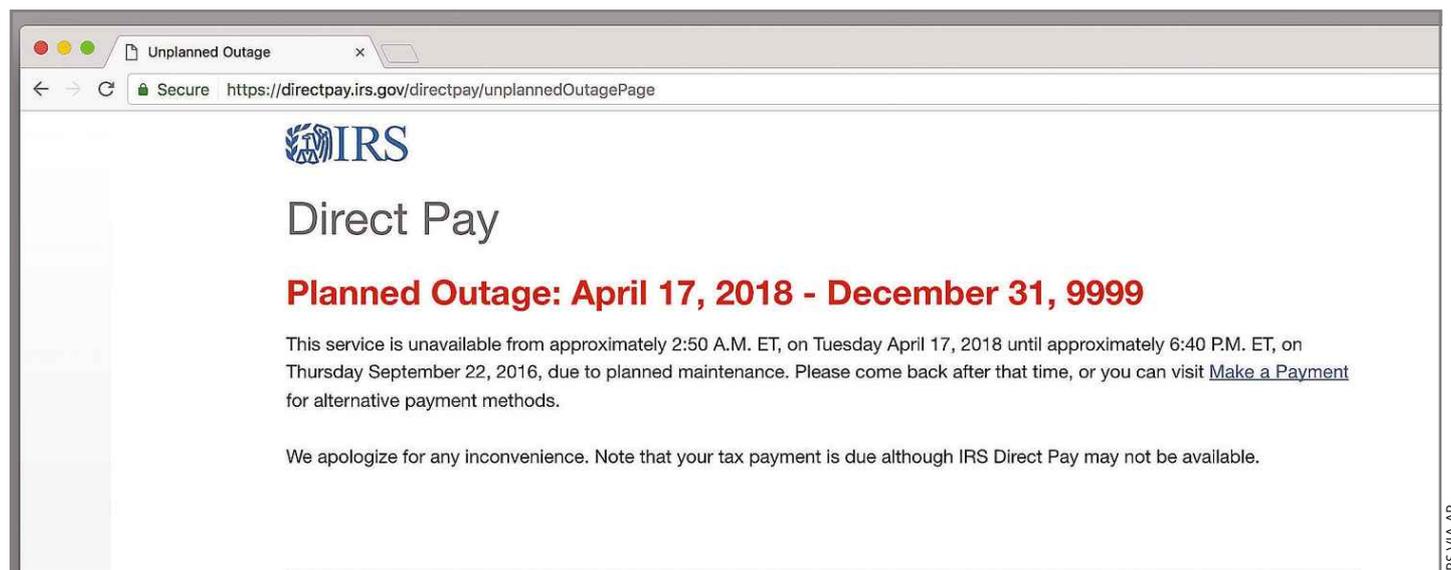
Earlier Tuesday, Americans who had waited until the final day to file online got an unwelcome surprise: The agency's website for making payments and gaining access to other key services was down due to what Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin later described as a "high-volume technical issue."

The website was back online late Tuesday.

"This is the busiest tax day of the year, and the IRS apologizes for the inconvenience this system issue caused for taxpayers," Acting IRS Commissioner David Kautter said in a statement. "The IRS appreciates everyone's patience during this period. The extra time will help taxpayers affected by this situation."

No additional paperwork is needed to get the one-day extension, the IRS said.

The IRS issue also caused problems for popular third-party tax preparers such as Tur-



An IRS message on the Direct Pay section of its website on Tuesday when the section was down. It was working again later in the day.

boTax and H&R Block. Both said that they would hold on to customer tax returns and file after the IRS system reopened.

The agency did not say how many people were affected by the outage. But last year, about 5 million tax returns were filed on the final day of the traditional tax season. Electronic filing is now the most popular way to file in the United States, because it cuts down on errors and gets refunds much faster.

The IRS said that at this point, the problem appears to be a hardware issue. It gave no further details on the cause or severity of the problem.

Tax day fell on April 17 this year because April 15 was a Sunday and April 16 was Emancipation Day, a holiday in Washington, D.C.

Former IRS Commissioner John Koskinen warned last year of a possible system failure, due in part to underfunding of the

agency. Among the areas that he said were underfunded were the aging information systems.

Frustrated taxpayers and baffled observers of course took to social media to complain. Political leaders weighed in as well, with Democrats blaming Republicans for budget cuts to the IRS.

"We know for certain the IRS's lack of funding is compounding these kinds of problems," said Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, the top

Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee.

Republicans have targeted the agency for budget cuts since taking control of the House in 2011, relenting a bit this year to help the IRS implement last year's overhaul of the tax code.

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