

Chicago Tribune



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Report: City's no breath of fresh air

Smoke, traffic have Chicago among top of US pollution list

By **Adriana Pérez**
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

During a year marked by Canadian wildfire smoke and an unprecedented dust storm, which worsened transportation emissions, Chicago ranked as the third-most polluted major U.S. city in 2025, according to a report released Tuesday.

The average concentration of small particulate matter in the city last year was 9.7 micrograms per cubic meter of air — almost double the World Health Organization's recommended limit of 5 micrograms per cubic meter, and a more than 15% increase from 2024, when Chicago dropped to seventh place among the most polluted major cities in the country. It was second in 2023. Smaller communities in the Joliet area — Ingalls Park, Lockport and Crest Hill — recorded the highest concentrations in the state, and all averaged above 10 micrograms per cubic meter.

"Places that typically enjoy good quality air, like the United States and Europe and Canada, were hit very hard (in 2025) ... by wildfire smoke," said Christi Chester-Schroeder, lead author of the report and senior air quality science manager at the Swiss technology company IQAir. "So it is a very stark reminder that air quality is a fragile asset. And just because we enjoyed periods of good air quality, it doesn't mean that it's guaranteed, and it doesn't mean that we need to continue to be vigilant about."

Bad air quality is a "chronic problem" in the Chicago area, said Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health programs at the Respiratory Health Association.

"We're a major city. There's a lot of industry here," he said. "There's a lot of traffic, including truck traffic and train traffic. We have power plant emissions blowing into the Chicago area from down south."

But when events like wildfire smoke or agricultural dust

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LET'S HAVE A BALL

Opening day arrives for Cubs, Sox with optimism, new faces, even a few bids



WHITE SOX AT BREWERS
First pitch: 1:10 p.m.
TV: CHSN
In Sports: Questions loom over the Sox as they continue their rebuilding project, including realistic expectations for Japanese slugger Munetaka Murakami.



NATIONALS AT CUBS
First pitch: 1:20 p.m.
TV: Marquee
In Sports: Infielder Alex Bregman has put in the work, and his performance and fit in the lineup could be what the Cubs need to push them into a deep October run.

Top: Kenzie Hart takes a group picture with family members in front of the marquee at Wrigley Field in Chicago on Wednesday. **JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**



Paul Sullivan
IN THE WAKE OF THE NEWS

The Chicago Tribune report on the Cubs' first home game of the 1876 season noted a crowd of around 5,000-6,000 went through "all sorts of troubles to get tickets and seats for Chicago's opening game of the centennial year."

But the Cubs lucked out, the report added, as "the weather encouraged the attendance, for a finer day for a game was hardly ever seen."

The Cubs, then named the White Stockings, wound up with a 6-0 win over the Cincinnati Reds in the first season of the National League, spurring optimism for local fans and media. That included my predecessor at the Tribune, an unnamed writer who complimented the team's front office, which then consisted of one man, owner William A. Hulbert.

"It looks as if the Chicago Club management had done it at last — had selected a club to fitly represent this city, and therefore to excel all other clubs in the West, if not in the country," the story read.

Whether the current Cubs team put together by President Jed Hoyer fitly represents the city is yet to be determined, but 150 years later they'll open the 2026 season

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Freeze on tipped wage hike vetoed

Mayor sets up another fight with city council

By **Jake Sheridan and Alice Yin**
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

When Mayor Brandon Johnson pulled out his silver veto pen once again on Wednesday — this time to strike down the City Council's plan to freeze scheduled minimum wage pay raises for tipped workers — he promised a fight.

Standing before supporters inside a restaurant in the Woodlawn neighborhood less than a year before his expected run for a second term, Johnson sounded like a candidate as he not only urged residents to call aldermen, relatives and even the governor to back him up but also cast himself



Mayor Brandon Johnson signs a veto of an ordinance pausing a phaseout of the subminimum tipped wage as he's joined by supporters Wednesday at Let's Eat to Live restaurant in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood. **BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

in stark political terms as the city's "organizer-in-chief" and a defender of working-class Chicagoans.

"I will not allow our progress to be put on pause. I will not allow us, as a city, to compromise what workers deserve. We will fight to preserve the raises of tipped workers," Johnson said.

Passed in 2023, the "One Fair Wage" ordinance, which gradually

eliminates the city's subminimum wage for tipped workers, was a key political win for Johnson and one he'll undoubtedly use as a cornerstone success story should he run for reelection. Last week, aldermen voted 30-18 to freeze the ordinance's implementation, citing rampant concerns from many restaurant owners that the hikes

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Jurors find social media platforms harm children

By **Kaitlyn Huamani and Barbara Ortutay**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — A jury in California found Meta and YouTube liable in a first-of-its-kind lawsuit that aimed to hold social media platforms responsible for harm to children using their services, awarding the plaintiff \$3 million in damages.

After more than 40 hours of deliberation across nine days, jurors decided Meta and YouTube were negligent in the design or operation of their platforms.

The jury also decided each company's negligence was a substantial factor in causing

harm to the plaintiff, a 20-year-old woman who says her use of social media as a child addicted her to the technology and exacerbated her mental health struggles.

This is the second verdict to come in this week against Meta after a jury in New Mexico determined the company harms children's mental health and safety, violating state law.

In the Los Angeles case, the multimillion-dollar verdict will only grow since the jury decided the companies acted with malice, oppression or fraud. This means they will hear new evidence Wednesday and head back into

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CHICAGOLAND

Delivery robots shatter bus shelters

Food delivery robots have shattered two city bus shelters within the last week, fueling those who say they shouldn't have to share the way with the apparently freewheeling automatons. **Page A3**

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