

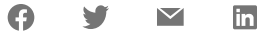
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# L.A.'s Smoggy Past, in Photos

By Nathan Masters

March 17, 2011



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crops withered; the elderly and young crowded into doctors' offices and hospital ERs with throbbing heads and shortness of breath."

Although a pristine view of the Hollywood sign may still elude Angelenos on most days, air pollution rarely cripples the city in present times as it did in the mid-twentieth century. Severe smog has largely abated, Miller argues, thanks to citizen activism, scientific advances, and landmark environmental legislation that allowed the EPA to regulate air pollutants.

That leaves many Southern Californians with only hazy memories of severe smog. The following images, from the photographic archives of the region's libraries, cultural institutions, and government agencies, show the extent of L.A.'s air pollution and provide a glimpse of how Southern California responded.

### Coping with the Smog

When air pollution reached its worst levels in Los Angeles during the 1940s, the University of Southern California (USC) concerned itself with air pollution research. In this photo from the [USC University Archives](#), two smog researchers use a plastic helmet and suit:



Courtesy of USC University Archives.

Members of the Highland Park Optimists Club evidently spent at least part of their 1954 banquet in smog-gas masks, as shown in this photograph from the [University of California Los Angeles \(UCLA\) Library Special Collections](#):





Courtesy of UCLA Library Special Collections - Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive.

Mildred Fitzpatrick dries her eye as she views a smog-choked Los Angeles from City Hall tower in this photo from the [USC Libraries' Regional History Collection](#):



Courtesy of USC Libraries Special Collections - Los Angeles Examiner Collection.



Courtesy of UCLA Library Special Collections - Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive.

### Southern California Responds

With smog alerts disrupting daily life and raising health concerns, both the public and civic and scientific officials grew concerned. In 1951, Los Angeles even crowned Helene Stanley as Miss Smog Fighter to drum up support for anti-smog measures. In this photograph, Miss Smog Fighter shows dismay as L.A. City Council member Lee W. Warburton opens the lid on a jar of smog in this 1951 photograph:





**Presaging Smog's Arrival**

Los Angeles suffered its first severe smog attack on July 26, 1943, but previous developments and practices suggested a general lack of concern about air quality.

**More Stories of Smog**

[How Los Angeles Began to Put its Smoggy Days Behind](#)



[Breathe Deep \(and then thank the EPA that you can\)](#)

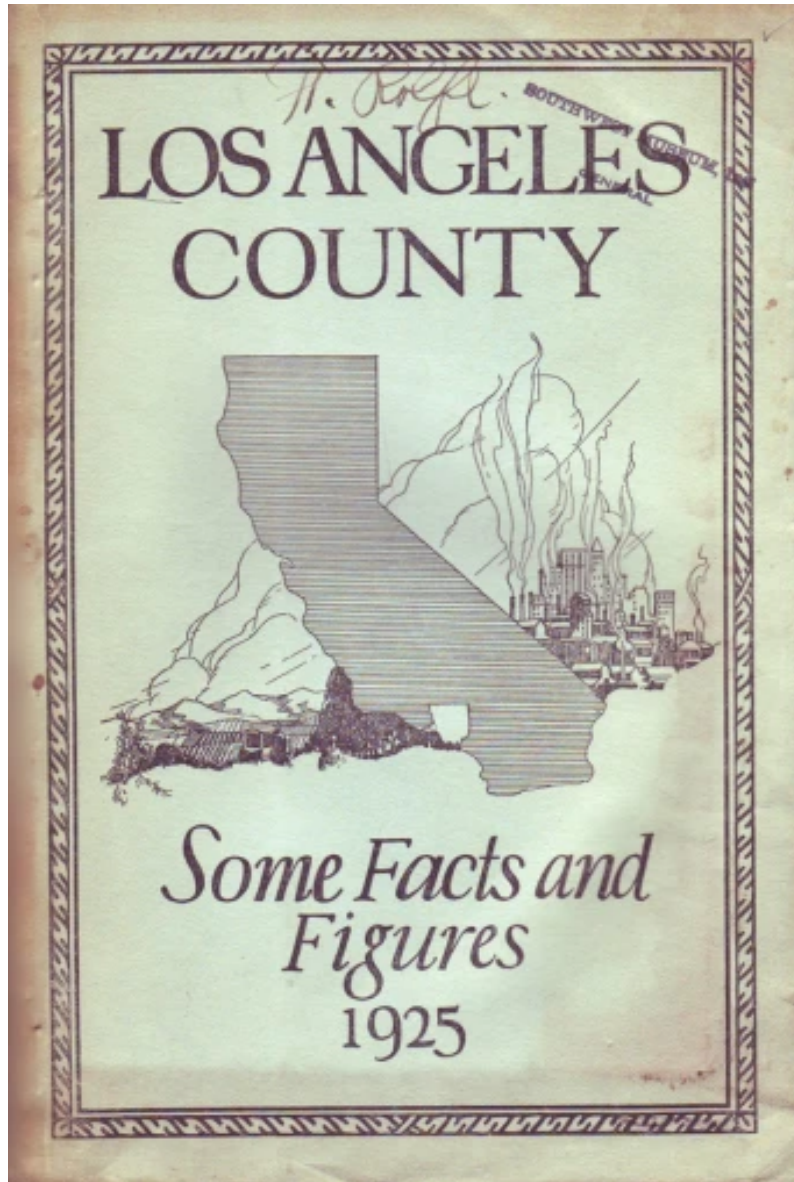


[Smog in a Can - Genuine Los Angeles Smog](#)

**The 1940 arrival of L.A.'s first diesel bus**, announced in this story from the Los Angeles Railway's May 1940 issue of *Two Bells*, was billed as an advance. Diesel exhaust has since been conclusively identified as a source of toxic air pollution, but **an article recently discovered in the Metro Library Transportation Library and Archive** suggests that, even as late as 1954, **diesel buses' role in air pollution was not understood.**







Courtesy of Autry National Center - Braun Research Library.

Even before they were crisscrossed by clogged highways, the air in Southern California's inland valleys was subject to pollution. Haze, possibly caused by the use of smudge pots to prevent frost on the Pomona Valley's citrus trees, partially obscures snow-capped Mount Baldy in this early-twentieth century postcard from the [Claremont Colleges' Honnold Mudd Library Special Collections](#):



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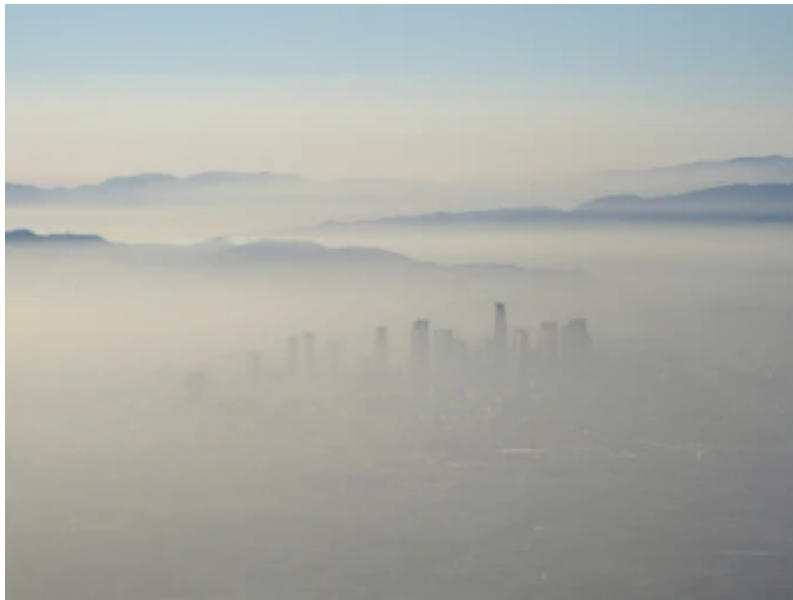
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California State University Dominguez Hills Archives, show the role of temperature inversion in creating smog:



Courtesy of California State University Dominguez Hills - Del Amo Estate Company Collection.

Extreme smog still can affect Los Angeles. In this photo, the skyline of modern downtown Los Angeles is obscured in a blanket of smog:



Courtesy of Metro Transportation Library and Archive

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organizations whose archives tell a fascinating story of L.A.



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