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## Nashville ranks among nation's worst carbon polluters

By RACHEL STULTS • *Staff Writer* • and LARRY WHEELER • *Gannett News Service* • May 29, 2008

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Tennessee's four largest cities rank among the worst of the nation's carbon emitters, largely because of urban sprawl, cheap electricity and a major dependency on autos for transportation, according to a report released today from the Brookings Institution, a public policy think tank in Washington.

The Nashville area footprint ranked 6th worst on the list of the country's 100 largest metropolitan areas, largely because of its dependence on cars over mass transit and its slowness in adapting to alternative energy sources, analysts say. Also among the 25 worst cities are Knoxville, Chattanooga and Memphis.

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Seven of the 10 worst offenders were in a cluster of states that included Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana.

Further, virtually all of the states cited as major offenders are in the eastern half of the United States, where roads are more heavily traveled, communities are sprawling, and heating and air conditioning are used almost year round.

The study aimed to measure global emissions of carbon dioxide, the most abundant greenhouse gas, which is contributing to warming the planet and could lead to serious economic and environmental consequences, according to leading atmospheric scientists.

Nashville's rank aligns with many other cities in the South, which are significantly more carbon intensive than other parts of the nation, including New York City, Chicago or even Los Angeles, according to the group's research, which derived its information from federal sources including the U.S. Department of Energy, the Federal Highway Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Andrea Sarzynski, senior research analyst with Brookings' Metropolitan Policy Program, said that in addition to auto and residential energy use, cities such as Nashville and Lexington, Ky., suffer because they are along freight corridors and tend to use "dirty fuels" such as coal for electricity.

Authors of the study said the information released today can help lawmakers more effectively craft policies to lower emissions and change the way people live.

### Not a complete picture

The study compares carbon emissions from vehicles and residential building across metropolitan areas.

The results capture only part of the nation's carbon footprint, omitting emissions from power plants, industrial and commercial sources and air travel.

The study also overlooks the impact that trees, land use and water have on absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Trip Pollard, director of the land and community program for the Southern Environmental Law Center, said for too long Tennessee has taken advantage of its low energy costs — a benefit that is now a disadvantage when it comes to the environment here.

"We've lagged behind other states in energy efficiency in terms of residential energy use, and this even more shows we have this enormous dependence on vehicles and driving, which is very costly on our environment, communities and these days our pocketbooks," Pollard said.

As energy costs in Tennessee finally begin to soar, Pollard said, state and local leaders will push harder toward finding alternative energy sources that can help reverse the state's footprint on the environment.

### Mayor cites progress

Nashville Mayor Karl Dean said the good news is that local leaders are already taking steps in the right direction with new "green" buildings and energy efficient policies across Metro.

But, he said, there's still more to be done.

"This report clearly shows one thing we already know to be true — that there's a strong need for regional planning to address environmental issues for the long term. Transportation and air quality concerns are not governed by county lines, or to put it another way — air doesn't stop at Old Hickory," Dean said in a prepared statement. "This is a difficult year for our bus system given the tight budget and increased fuel costs. But in upcoming years, expanding mass transportation in Nashville is something we need to work on, not only for environmental reasons but also quality of life reasons."

Pollard said the study should serve as a wake-up call for Tennesseans.

"Tennessee can move forward rather quickly, but some of it will take longer to change because it's taken us decades to build the system we have," Pollard said. "At the state level, one of the biggest things we need to do is put more money into alternatives of driving, and we need to look at ways to promote more traditional neighborhood development patterns that don't consume so much land and don't require us to drive everywhere."

To some degree, Pollard said, Nashville has already begun to do that, by pushing mixed-use development and creating growth and density in its urban core.

Per capita carbon emissions were highest in Lexington, Ky., 3.4 metric tons per person, and lowest in Honolulu, Hawaii, 1.3 metric tons per person, the report found.

Other cities that ranked as low carbon emitters were Los Angeles, New York and Portland, Ore.

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