Particularly given Governor Perry's presidential candidacy, I thought it would be interesting to see how Texas is doing on air pollution. Perry's record has been controversial, but the Texas environmental quality agency has a graph showing improvement in ozone levels over the past decade:

However, in considering this graph, it's important to realize that over the preceding fifteen years, LA had drastically reduced the number of bad ozone days (from 150 days per year in 1985 to around 30 in 2001), while Houston's had changed by less (from around 70 to 30). If Houston had followed LA's trend, it would have been down to around 15 instead of 30.

As you can see, the post-2005 downward trend in Texas is not typical of American cities but also isn't completely unique:

Note that these numbers are based on a different measure of ozone pollution so they aren't directly comparable with the previous graph. Also note that all of these figures come from the State of Texas, so the specific measures were probably the most favorable to the state. Critics argue that the state hasn't made such good progress in other dimensions:

> The air in Texas is getting better, but we have a long way to go. Our own state environmental agency (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality) released a report earlier this year outlining areas around the state where the pollution levels for air toxics exceed the state's OWN screening guidelines. Only four of the 13 areas around the state listed are showing any improvement. The other nine are static or getting worse. Some of these areas have been on the air pollution watch list for more than a decade. Texas also continues to be number ONE in emissions of many of the most serious pollutants, including nitrogen oxides (a precursor to ozone), carbon dioxide, volatile organic compounds, particulate matter (PM10) and mercury from power plants.

Putting aside these other issues, should Perry get credit for any recent downward trend ozone? Probably not. Atlanta did even better, and Chicago also had a

downward trend for three of the four years. Moreover, the federal EPA has been clamping down especially hard on Texas in recent years. According to EPA, reductions in Houston are largely due to a decrease in refinery utilization, which the state disputes. Most significantly, the state's reported downward trend began in 2006 at the earliest, whereas Perry took office in 2000 when Bush resigned.

By the way, if you're wondering about the title of this post, it's from this Commander Cody song:

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDAEXn8RJFs]