



Environmental News

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

EPA Announces Final Designations for First Fine Particle Standard

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(Washington, D.C. – December 17, 2004) Twenty governors were told by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today that certain areas of their states do not meet the nation's first fine particle (PM_{2.5}) air quality standards. While the great majority of the nation's counties meet the new health-based standards, all or part of 225 counties nationwide, as well as the District of Columbia, are not in attainment with the standards.

"The good news for 30 states is that they already meet the fine particle standards," Administrator Mike Leavitt said, "The good news for the remaining areas of the country is that we have new rules both proposed and in place to help these states make their air cleaner to breathe."

Thirty states and their 2,909 counties received the good news that they meet PM_{2.5} air quality standards. These states will need to continue their progress by sustaining clean air. "*The Particle Pollution Report: Current Understanding of Air Quality and Emissions through 2003*," issued earlier this week reported that 2003 PM levels were the lowest since monitoring began.

Administrator Leavitt noted that, "Today's cleaner air represents more than four decades of progress since the signing of the first Clean Air Act in 1963, followed by the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Amendments in 1990. This is a clean air relay that gets better with each generation, and we are making more progress than ever before."

The reduction of fine particle pollution is a critical element of the Bush Administration's comprehensive national clean air strategy -- a strategy that makes clean air and clean energy a centerpiece of public health protection and a vital economy. This strategy includes Clear Skies legislation, the Clean Air Interstate Rule, and the Administration's recent rule to reduce pollution from non-road diesel engines. These rules are important components of EPA's efforts to help states and localities meet the protective national fine particle and 8-hour ozone air quality standards. Together these rules will help all areas of the country achieve cleaner air.

PM_{2.5} – approximately 1/30th the size of an average human hair – can aggravate heart and lung diseases and has been associated with a variety of serious health problems including heart attacks, chronic bronchitis and asthma attacks. Today's action officially notifies states that they need to do more to reduce fine particle pollution in order to protect human health.

Meeting these standards will prevent *at least*: 15,000 premature deaths; 75,000 cases of chronic bronchitis; 10,000 hospital admissions for respiratory and cardiovascular disease; hundreds of thousands of occurrences of aggravated asthma; and 3.1 million days when people miss work because they are suffering from symptoms related to particle pollution exposure.

States with nonattainment areas must submit plans by early 2008 that outline how they will meet the PM_{2.5} standards. They are expected to attain clean air as soon as possible and not later than 2010. EPA can grant one five-year extension for areas with more severe problems. The attainment date for those areas would be 2015.

To develop these final designations, EPA requested recommendations from state governors and tribal leaders on the appropriate boundaries for nonattainment areas. EPA carefully reviewed the state and tribal recommendations and revised them in June 2004 - adding more than 100 counties that EPA believed contributed to air quality violations. The Agency then provided the opportunity for state and tribal representatives to respond. EPA's recommendations included counties where monitors show violations of the PM_{2.5} standards and surrounding counties that contribute to those violations.

For more information on the particle pollution, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/pmdesignations/> .

For more information on the 2004 Clean Air rules, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/cleanair2004> .

For more information on particulate matter trends, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/airtrends> .

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