



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

OFFICE OF THE
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

JUN 29 2011

The Honorable Benigno R. Fitial
Governor
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Juan A. Sablan Memorial Building
Capitol Hill
Saipan, Marianas Protectorate 96950

Dear Governor Fitial:

On November 12, 2010, I sent a letter providing you the opportunity to recommend air quality designations for the revised primary National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. This letter is to notify you of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) preliminary decision to designate all of CNMI as unclassifiable/attainment and to inform you of our approach for completing the designations for the revised NO₂ standard.

On January 22, 2010, the EPA strengthened the health-based NAAQS for NO₂ by setting a new 1-hour NO₂ standard at the level of 100 parts per billion (ppb). The EPA also retained the annual NO₂ standard of 53 ppb. This suite of standards will protect public health by limiting people's exposures to short-term peak concentrations of NO₂ and by limiting community-wide NO₂ concentrations to levels below those that have been linked to respiratory-related emergency department visits and hospital admissions in the United States. To determine compliance with the new standard, the EPA established new ambient air monitoring and reporting requirements for NO₂. In urban areas, monitors are required near major roads as well as in other locations where maximum concentrations are expected. Additional monitors will be required in some large urban areas to measure the highest concentrations of NO₂ that occur more broadly across communities.

In our November 2010 letter, the EPA stated that we anticipated designating most areas as "unclassifiable," indicating that there are insufficient data to determine whether or not an area is attaining the revised NO₂ NAAQS. The EPA believed this approach was appropriate given that: (1) the new near-road monitoring network requirements associated with the revised NO₂ NAAQS will not be effective until January 2013, so air quality data from these new monitors would not be available to inform initial designations; and (2) the NO₂ monitors in the existing NO₂ network do not provide adequate evidence to determine whether or not the new NAAQS is met at other locations, especially those closer to NO₂ emission sources such as roadways.

After reviewing all the recommendations we received, the EPA now intends to designate all areas as "unclassifiable/attainment." The EPA is making this change because, based on the most recent air quality data from 2008-2010, all monitored areas meet the 2010 NO₂ NAAQS. While the EPA acknowledges that the existing NO₂ monitoring network does not provide adequate evidence to

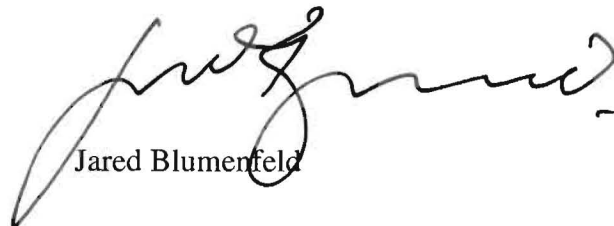
determine whether or not the new NAAQS is met everywhere, there currently is no evidence of violations anywhere. Based on this, the EPA believes "unclassifiable/attainment" is the most appropriate designation to use at this time. The EPA intends to redesignate areas, as appropriate, after sufficient air quality data from the new monitoring network are available.

The EPA intends to designate CNMI as a single unclassifiable/attainment area. Alternatively, we will designate all areas of CNMI as unclassifiable/attainment using any area boundaries you may provide in response to this letter. As we did in our November 2010 letter, EPA recommends that each state and territory carefully consider the implications of the boundaries it selects for its Prevention of Significant Deterioration permitting program for new or modified sources to ensure that they are consistent with its objectives for managing air quality deterioration and economic growth.

If you or your staff have additional information that the EPA should consider with respect to the designations including area boundary recommendations, please submit it to us by August 29, 2011. We are also making the EPA's preliminary designation decisions and supporting documentation available to the general public for review. We are accepting public comments on our preliminary decisions for 30 days after the notice of their availability is published in the Federal Register. We will review any information we receive from CNMI and the general public by these dates. We plan to promulgate the final designations by October 31, 2011.

We look forward to a continued dialogue with you and your staff as we work together to implement the revised NO₂ NAAQS. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me, or have your staff contact Deborah Jordan of my staff at (415) 947-8715.

Sincerely,



Jared Blumenfeld

cc: Frank Rabauliman
Director, CNMI Division of Environmental Quality