

**EPA's Response to State and Tribal Recommendations for Areas Not Meeting the
2012 Revised Primary Annual Fine Particle National Ambient Air Quality
Standard Established in 2012**

FACT SHEET

ACTION

- On August 19, 2014, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sent letters to state and tribal representatives in response to their initial recommendations for areas meeting and not meeting the 2012 revised primary annual fine particle (PM_{2.5}) National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).
- These initial recommendations from the states and tribes are for the revised annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS that EPA promulgated on December 14, 2012 (78 FR 3086, January 15, 2013). The standard was strengthened from 15.0 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) to 12.0 µg/m³. This standard is in effect and EPA is moving forward with implementation as required by the Clean Air Act.
- EPA intends to designate 14 areas (in six states) with monitors that violate the standards as “nonattainment.”
- Through a combination of regularly scheduled technical systems audits of non-EPA laboratories processing state fine particle pollution monitoring data and additional assessments of data quality, EPA has identified data quality issues that affect the Agency’s proposed designations for a number of areas. To address these areas, EPA intends to designate as “unclassifiable” 2 territories, 1 area in Indian country, 3 areas in Georgia, the entire state of Tennessee (except for 3 counties in the Chattanooga area), the entire state of Illinois, and 2 counties in Indiana and 4 counties and 1 city in Missouri (related to the unclassifiable status of Illinois). The agency has invalidated PM_{2.5} data from a number of monitoring sites that would have been used to assess compliance with the 2012 PM_{2.5} NAAQS. EPA is working to ensure corrective actions are taken at each of the affected laboratories.
- As part of a Clean Air Act process to ensure that all areas have complete data before designations are made, EPA is deferring designations for 1 year for five areas (primarily in Georgia, but also affecting single counties in South Carolina and Alabama) because EPA believes that an additional year of monitoring data will result in 3 years of complete and valid data needed for designations. A small portion of the monitoring data from these areas was impacted by a winter storm that caused a power outage at the state-run lab responsible for processing the data.
- The Agency intends to designate all other areas of the country as “unclassifiable/attainment.”

- States and tribes now have 120 days to work with and provide additional information to EPA before the Administrator makes final decisions for area designations. EPA plans to make final designations in December 2014 using air quality monitoring data from 2011, 2012, and 2013.
- After EPA sets a new NAAQS or revises an existing standard, the Agency works with the states and some tribes to formally identify or “designate” areas as nonattainment, attainment/unclassifiable, or unclassifiable.
- In a forthcoming *Federal Register* notice, EPA will announce a 30-day opportunity for the public to comment on the Agency’s response to the state and tribal recommendations and the Agency’s intended designations for each state and areas of Indian country.
- Once designations take effect, they govern what subsequent regulatory actions states, tribes, and EPA must take to improve or preserve air quality in each area. EPA will work with the states and tribes to share the responsibility of reducing PM_{2.5} air pollution.
- Current and upcoming federal standards and safeguards, including pollution reduction rules for power plants, vehicles and fuels, will assure steady progress to reduce pollution of fine particulate matter and will protect public health in communities across the country.
- History shows us that better health and cleaner air go hand-in-hand with economic growth. Working closely with the states and tribes, EPA is implementing the 2012 primary annual PM_{2.5} standard using a common sense approach that improves air quality and minimizes burden on state and local governments. As part of this routine process, EPA is working closely with the states to identify areas in the country that meet the standard and those that need to take steps to reduce air pollution.

ABOUT DESIGNATIONS

- The designation process begins with state governors evaluating air quality monitoring data across their state along with other factors such as sources of pollutants that either directly emit PM_{2.5} or emit precursor pollutants that form PM_{2.5}, and weather patterns then making recommendations to EPA for how all areas in the state should be designated. Tribal leaders may also make area recommendations but they are not required to do so.
- After EPA makes final designations, areas designated nonattainment (not meeting the standard or contributing to a violation in a nearby area) will be required to take action to improve their air quality.
 - As required by the Clean Air Act, those actions may include stricter controls on industrial facilities and additional planning requirements for transportation-related sources.

- Nonattainment areas must implement “transportation conformity,” which requires local transportation and air quality officials to coordinate planning to ensure that transportation-related emissions from projects such as road construction, do not interfere with an area’s ability to reach its clean air goals. Transportation conformity requirements become effective one year after an area is designated as nonattainment.
 - Nonattainment areas also are subject to new source review requirements. New Source Review is a permitting program for industrial facilities to ensure that new and modified sources of pollution do not impede progress toward cleaner air.
- Areas designated “attainment/unclassifiable” (areas that are monitoring attainment and/or for areas that do not have monitors but for which the EPA has reason to believe are likely attainment and are not contributing to nearby violations) will not have to take steps to improve air quality but they must continue to take steps to help prevent their air quality from deteriorating to unhealthy levels.
- Areas designated “unclassifiable” (areas where the EPA cannot determine based on available information whether the area is meeting or not meeting the NAAQS or where the EPA has not determined that the area contributes to a nearby violation) will not have to take steps to improve air quality at this time, but they must continue to take steps to help prevent their air quality from deteriorating to unhealthy levels.
- Areas for which the Agency has deferred action will be designated at a later date.
- State, local and tribal governments must detail control requirements in plans demonstrating how they will meet the 2012 primary annual PM_{2.5} standard. Those plans are known as state implementation plans, or SIPs. States must submit their plans to EPA within 18 months from the effective date of designations – likely by Fall 2016.
- In April 2013, EPA issued guidance on *Area Designations for the 2012 Revised Annual Fine Particle National Ambient Air Quality Standard*, which provided information on the schedule and process for designating areas for the purpose of implementing the 2012 primary annual PM_{2.5} standard.
 - The guidance also identified factors that the EPA will evaluate in making final nonattainment areas boundary decisions and that states and tribes should consider as they make their recommendations for area designations.
 - These factors are:
 - Air quality data,
 - Emissions and emissions related data,
 - a. Location of sources and population
 - b. Emissions levels and emissions controls
 - c. Traffic and commuting patterns

- d. Growth rates and patterns
 - Meteorology (weather/transport patterns)
 - Geography/topography (mountain ranges or other air basin boundaries)
 - Jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., counties, air districts, reservations, metropolitan planning organizations)
- When considering the above factor analysis, the EPA looked at directly emitted PM_{2.5} and its precursors (e.g., nitrogen oxides (NO_x), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), volatile organic compounds (VOC), and ammonia (NH₃)).
- EPA intends to use these factors and additional analytical tools to make its final decisions on designations and nonattainment area boundaries in December 2014.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on the designation process for the 2012 primary annual PM_{2.5} standard, and to view individual letters from EPA to states and tribes, go to EPA's Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/pmdesignations/>.
- Please direct questions to the following staff in the EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards: Beth Palma (palma.elizabeth@epa.gov, 919-541-5432) or Martha Keating (keating.martha@epa.gov, 919-541-9407).