

Additional Final Area Designations for the Annual Fine Particle Standard Established in 2012 for Areas in Florida

Action

- On July 31, 2018, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued initial designations for the 2012 primary annual national ambient air quality standard for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) for all remaining undesignated areas in Florida.
- EPA is designating five counties in Florida – Alachua, Broward, Gilchrist, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach - as unclassifiable/attainment based on 2015-2017 air quality monitoring data. EPA designated the other 62 counties in Florida as unclassifiable/attainment in a prior action in 2016.
- EPA and its partners at state, tribal and local air agencies are taking action to cut particle pollution. Efforts by air agencies to attain the 1997 and 2006 PM_{2.5} standards are already working to reduce unhealthy levels of fine particle pollution. In addition, EPA's Clean Diesel Program is helping to reduce fine particle pollution across the country from highway, nonroad and stationary diesel engines. Also, as a result of federal programs to address interstate transport, levels of sulfur dioxide (which can form PM_{2.5}) have been reduced. In some areas, wood smoke emissions are a significant contributor to fine particle pollution. A wood stove or fireplace changeout campaign or other program targeting wood smoke emissions may reduce emissions and help an area attain the standard. From 2000 to 2016, the national annual average PM_{2.5} concentrations have dropped 42%.

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. They then make recommendations to EPA for how all areas in the state should be designated.
- In today's action, EPA is designating areas as unclassifiable/attainment. In areas designated unclassifiable/attainment, states will not have to take additional steps to improve air quality, but they must continue to prevent their air quality from deteriorating to unhealthy levels.

Background

- The Clean Air Act requires EPA to issue area designations after the Agency sets a new national ambient air quality standard or revises an existing standard. EPA formally designates areas as "nonattainment" (not meeting the standard or contributing to a nearby violation), "unclassifiable/attainment" (meeting the standard or expected to be meeting the standard and not contributing to a nearby violation), or "unclassifiable" (insufficient information to support a designation of nonattainment or unclassifiable/attainment).

- On December 14, 2012, EPA revised the national ambient air quality standard for PM_{2.5} by strengthening the annual health-based standard to from 15 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) to 12 µg/m³. Thousands of scientific studies have linked exposure to these tiny particles - approximately 1/30th the size of a human hair - with serious human health problems including premature death in people with heart and lung disease; nonfatal heart attacks; and increased hospital admissions and doctor and emergency room visits for respiratory and cardiovascular disease.
- 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 designation decisions and that states and tribes should consider as they make their recommendations for area designations.
- After reviewing recommendations provided by states and some tribes, EPA completed the process of determining initial designations for most areas of the United States in notices signed by the Administrator on December 18, 2014, and March 31, 2015 (based on 2011-2013 data and 2012-2014 data, respectively). The effective date of those designations was April 15, 2015. In those actions, the EPA announced it was deferring designation decisions for several locations pending review of additional information. Following those actions, designations remained deferred for three areas (covering 14 counties) in Georgia, 92 counties in Tennessee, the entire state of Florida (covering 67 counties), and Indian country located in those areas.
- On August 30, 2016, the EPA Administrator signed a final action promulgating initial designations for deferred areas in Georgia (covering 14 counties) and Florida (covering 62 counties), and areas of Indian country located in those areas. Following that action, designations remained deferred for two areas (covering five counties) in Florida and the entire state of Tennessee, excluding three counties in the Chattanooga area.
- On May 10, 2017, the EPA Administrator signed a final action promulgating initial designations for deferred areas in Tennessee (covering 92 counties). Following that action, designations remained deferred for two areas (five counties) in Florida.

Additional Information

- For more information on the designation process for the fine particle standards, go to EPA's Web site at <https://www.epa.gov/particle-pollution-designations>.