

Additional Final Area Designations and Technical Amendment for the 2012 Annual Fine Particle Standard Established in 2012

Action

- On March 31, 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued additional or revised initial area designations for several areas and a technical amendment to correct an inadvertent error in the initial area designation for one area for the 2012 annual national ambient air quality standard for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). The EPA strengthened the annual fine particle standard to 12 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) in 2012. After working closely with the states, the EPA is taking additional steps toward completing the routine Clean Air Act process to determine whether areas across the country meet the air quality standard.
- EPA is designating five areas as unclassifiable/attainment in the state of Georgia, including two neighboring counties in the bordering states of Alabama and South Carolina that were initially deferred in the EPA's January 15, 2015, rulemaking:
 - Augusta (Richmond County and Columbia County in Georgia and Aiken County in South Carolina)
 - Columbus (Muscogee County in Georgia and Russell County in Alabama)
 - Savannah, Georgia (Chatham County and Effingham County)
 - Valdosta, Georgia (Brooks County and Lowndes County)
 - Washington County, Georgia.
- EPA is changing the initial designation from nonattainment to unclassifiable/attainment for the following four areas based on the availability of complete, certified 2014 air quality data showing these areas meet the 2012 PM_{2.5} standard:
 - Canton, Ohio
 - Allentown, Pennsylvania
 - Johnstown, Pennsylvania
 - Cincinnati-Hamilton, Kentucky-Ohio
- EPA is changing the initial designation from nonattainment to unclassifiable for the Louisville, Indiana-Kentucky area. Complete, certified 2014 air quality data for the Indiana portion of the area meet the 2012 PM_{2.5} standard, however, because valid data do not yet exist for the Jefferson County, Kentucky portion of the area, the EPA is not able to determine whether air quality in the entire area is meeting the 2012 PM_{2.5} standard, or whether the area in Indiana is contributing to a potential violation in the Jefferson County, Kentucky portion of the area.
- No areas of tribal lands are impacted by this action.

- EPA and its partners at state, tribal and local agencies are taking action to cut particle pollution. Efforts by states and tribes 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, the national annual average PM_{2.5} concentration has dropped 34%.

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 and then making recommendations to EPA for how all areas in the state should be designated. In today's action EPA is designating areas as: unclassifiable/attainment or unclassifiable.

Unclassifiable/Attainment Areas

- Areas designated "unclassifiable/attainment" will not have to take additional steps to improve air quality, but they must continue to take steps to help prevent their air quality from deteriorating to unhealthy levels.

Unclassifiable Areas

- EPA cannot determine, based on available information, whether an unclassifiable area is meeting the standard or contributing to a nearby violation. These areas will not have to take additional 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.
- EPA will work closely with these areas to ensure that identified problems with air quality monitoring procedures are corrected. The Agency intends to assess air quality in these areas once the requisite amount of valid air monitoring data are available.

Background

- The Clean Air Act requires EPA to issue 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 classify).
- On December 14, 2012, EPA revised the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for PM_{2.5} by strengthening the annual health-based standard to 12 µg/m³ from 15 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 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;
 - Meteorology (weather/transport patterns);
 - Geography/topography (mountain ranges or other air basin boundaries); and
 - 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 emissions of the “precursor” pollutants that form it (e.g., nitrogen oxides (NO_x), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), volatile organic compounds (VOC), and ammonia (NH₃)).
- 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 a notice signed by the Administrator on December 18, 2014. The effective date of those designations is April 15, 2015. In that action the EPA announced it was deferring designation decisions for several areas pending review of additional information. Today’s action provides initial designation decisions for five of the areas initially deferred, and changes the initial designation for five other areas prior to the April 15, 2015, effective date of those designations.

Additional Information

- For more information on the designation process for the fine particle standards go to EPA’s Web site at www.epa.gov/pmdesignations.