

FACT SHEET: NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING FOR THE EPA RECONSIDERATION OF THE NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARDS FOR PARTICULATE MATTER

AIR QUALITY DESIGNATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

On January 6, 2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a proposal to strengthen the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for fine particle pollution (PM_{2.5}) by revising the level of the primary (health-based) annual PM_{2.5} standard from 12 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) to within the range of 9.0 to 10.0 µg/m³. EPA proposed to retain the primary (health-based) 24-hour PM_{2.5} standard, with its level of 35 µg/m³.

EPA also proposed to retain the primary (health-based) 24-hour PM₁₀ standard, which provides public health protection against exposures to coarse particles. The Administrator proposed to conclude that current evidence does not call into question the adequacy of that standard.

In addition, EPA proposed not to revise the current secondary (welfare-based) standards for both PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ at this time. The Administrator proposed to conclude that the available evidence and information do not call into question the adequacy of protection provided by the current secondary PM standards for non-ecological effects (i.e., visibility, climate, and materials effects).

AIR QUALITY DESIGNATIONS

- Improving air quality is a partnership between the federal government, States and Tribal Nations. EPA will work closely with state, local and tribal air agencies to implement any new or revised PM_{2.5} NAAQS.
- If EPA issues a new or revised PM_{2.5} NAAQS, the Clean Air Act directs EPA to take a series of NAAQS implementation-related actions and requires states to deliver the anticipated public health benefits. Meeting the standards in a given area would depend upon factors such as the level of PM_{2.5} in the area and the emissions reduction measures needed to attain the NAAQS.
- Generally, within 2 years of setting/revising a NAAQS, EPA designates all areas of the country as **attainment** (meeting the standards), **nonattainment** (not meeting the standards), or **unclassifiable** (not enough data to make a determination).
 - Nonattainment areas include areas that are violating the standards and other nearby areas with sources of emissions that contribute to those violations. EPA works closely with states and tribes as it determines the initial area designations and the appropriate geographic boundaries.
 - For the PM_{2.5} NAAQS, the Clean Air Act provides that all nonattainment areas are classified as “Moderate” at the outset. EPA would reclassify areas to “Serious” later in the implementation process, under certain circumstances, such as continued failure to attain the NAAQS within the required timeframe.

- Once designated, states with nonattainment areas must develop state implementation plans (SIPs) showing how they will meet the new or revised standards.
 - States with Moderate nonattainment areas are required to adopt and submit nonattainment plan SIP submissions to EPA within 18 months of the effective date of designation. These SIP submissions must meet applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.
 - States with Moderate nonattainment areas must attain the PM_{2.5} NAAQS as expeditiously as practicable, but by no later than the end of the sixth calendar year after designations. Under certain circumstances, states may qualify for up to two 1-year extensions.
 - In the event of reclassification to Serious, states must meet additional statutory and regulatory requirements in a new nonattainment plan SIP submission.
 - States with Serious nonattainment areas must attain the NAAQS as expeditiously as practicable, but by no later than the end of the 10th calendar year following designation. Under certain circumstances, states may qualify for one additional extension of the attainment date up to 5 additional years.
 - EPA's [PM_{2.5} SIP Requirements Rule](#) provides additional details concerning Moderate and Serious area plan requirements.

- Tribes may, but are not required to, develop their own plans for nonattainment areas in Indian country. Where necessary, EPA will develop plans for any tribal area that chooses not to develop its own plans.

- As a part of the nonattainment plan SIP development process, EPA encourages states to address environmental justice (EJ) considerations. States are encouraged to involve community groups in the SIP development process, and to use updated tools (such as EJScreen) to identify low income and overburdened communities where control measures could be appropriately targeted.

- Reductions in particle pollution from upcoming mobile, power plant and other air pollution federal regulations could help some areas in reaching the proposed standards.

WILDLAND FIRE AND EXCEPTIONAL EVENTS CONSIDERATIONS

- EPA recognizes the increasing challenges and human health impacts that wildland fire and smoke pose in communities all around the country. EPA works closely with other federal agencies, state and local health departments, tribal nations, and other partners to provide information, tools, and resources to support communities in preparing for, responding to, and avoiding health impacts from wildland fire and smoke.

- EPA will continue to support states in managing the impacts of wildland fire and smoke on attainment of the national ambient air quality standards for PM. The Clean Air Act and the Exceptional Events Rule provide a framework for addressing air quality data impacted by exceptional

events in the context of certain regulatory decisions, including designations regarding which areas have attained the NAAQS. Both the Exceptional Events Rule and the 2016 PM_{2.5} State Implementation Plan Requirements Rule address fire-related emissions, including emissions from wildfires and prescribed fires on wildland. EPA has also issued detailed [guidance](#) on how states can seek to exclude data influenced by such events under the Exceptional Events Rule.

- The Exceptional Events Rule and the 2016 PM_{2.5} State Implementation Plan Requirements Rule have frameworks in place to address emissions from wildland fires, including emissions from both wildfires and prescribed fires on wildland. EPA has issued detailed guidance on the topics of wildfire and prescribed fire on wildland, providing information on how states can seek exclusion of data influenced by such events under the Exceptional Events Rule.
- More information on exceptional events demonstration submission deadlines can be found in Table 2 to [40 CFR section 50.14\(c\)\(2\)\(vi\)](#) – “Schedule for Initial Notification and Demonstration Submission for Data Influenced by Exceptional Events for Use in Initial Area Designations”
- In addition, EPA acknowledges that federal, state and Tribal agency partners, as well as other stakeholders, view the use of prescribed fire as an important tool for reducing wildfire risk and the severity of wildfires and wildfire smoke. EPA guidance issued pursuant to the Exceptional Events Rule provides information regarding air quality impacts associated with prescribed fire on wildland, approaches to mitigate the smoke impacts of such prescribed fires, and procedures for seeking the exclusion of air quality data that is influenced by prescribed fire on wildland. EPA supports the use of these Exceptional Events Rule provisions by state and Tribal air agencies, when needed.
- Going forward, EPA is committed to partnering with federal land managers and working with states, Tribes, air quality management districts, and other stakeholders to provide the necessary tools and resources to engage in responsible wildfire [risk reduction](#) activities while ensuring attainment and maintenance of air quality standards to protect public health and welfare under the Clean Air Act. EPA intends to engage through opportunities such as the Wildland Fire Leadership Council to enhance communications and understanding about air quality impacts from smoke generally and on the particulate matter air quality standards, among federal agencies and other key stakeholders. EPA is also continuing to review its existing Exceptional Events wildland fire-related tools and information to identify opportunities to clarify or otherwise improve access to information and resources.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

- In August 2016, EPA published the [PM_{2.5} SIP Requirements Rule](#) to apply to all existing and future PM_{2.5} NAAQS.

- The PM_{2.5} SIP Requirements Rule addresses a number of important nonattainment area planning issues, including clarifying SIP due dates and attainment date extension criteria, the process for determining control strategies, and provisions and definitions related to the Nonattainment New Source Review permitting program.
- The PM_{2.5} SIP Requirements Rule also includes environmental justice considerations in the context of PM_{2.5} nonattainment area planning. EPA encourages states to take actions to address environmental justice concerns, such as increasing opportunities for meaningful involvement by community groups in SIP development and using updated tools (such as EJScreen) to identify low income and overburdened communities where additional monitoring may be needed, and where control measures can be targeted.
- In this action, EPA is not proposing changes to the PM_{2.5} SIP Requirements Rule. However, commenters are encouraged to share information on how states might develop implementation plans that encourage early reductions as well as reductions that facilitate or amplify reductions benefiting overburdened communities. Following promulgation of a final NAAQS, the EPA may consider whether additional guidance on the topic of environmental justice and PM_{2.5} implementation is appropriate, beyond what is already included in the existing PM_{2.5} SIP Requirements.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on particle pollution and to read the proposed action, visit <https://www.epa.gov/pm-pollution>
- For more information on state implementation planning requirements, visit <https://www.epa.gov/pm-pollution/pm25-naaqs-final-sip-requirements-rule-july-2016>
- For more information on the Exceptional Events Rule and related guidance, visit <https://www.epa.gov/air-quality-analysis/treatment-air-quality-data-influenced-exceptional-events-homepage-exceptional>
- EPA has regulated particle pollution since 1971. The agency has revised the standards four times -- in 1987, 1997, 2006 and 2012 – to ensure they continue to protect public health and welfare. A [table of historical PM standards](http://www.epa.gov/ttn/naaqs/standards/pm/s_pm_history.html) is available at http://www.epa.gov/ttn/naaqs/standards/pm/s_pm_history.html