

EPA Guidance on *Initial Area Designations for the 2012 Revised Primary Annual Fine Particle National Ambient Air Quality Standard*

Statement

EPA is making available guidance that lays out the schedule and process the Agency intends to follow when making initial “nonattainment” and “attainment” area designation and boundary recommendations for the revised national air quality standard for fine particle pollution. EPA strengthened the annual health standard from 15.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ to 12.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in December 2012. The guidance also identifies 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. Reducing fine particle pollution has direct health benefits including decreased mortality rates, fewer incidents of heart attacks, strokes, and childhood asthma. EPA will work closely with states and tribes throughout the process of designating areas for the revised fine particle standard and addressing emissions that lead to high levels of fine particle pollution.

Questions and Answers

1. How will EPA and the states determine the size of nonattainment areas?

When determining the boundaries for each nonattainment area, EPA and the states will begin with each monitor or group of monitors that indicate violations of the 12.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ standard, and then evaluate contribution by considering those counties in the entire metropolitan area (e.g., Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA) or Combined Statistical Area (CSA)) in which the violating monitor(s) is (are) located.

2. What factors should be considered when setting the boundaries of nonattainment areas?

The guidance identifies the following five factors that EPA will evaluate and that states and tribes should consider in making their recommendations for area designations:

1. air quality data
2. emissions and emissions-related data
3. meteorology
4. geography/topography
5. jurisdictional boundaries

3. What air pollutant emissions should this analysis evaluate?

In this five factor analysis, EPA intends to look at directly emitted $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ and its precursors (e.g., nitrogen oxides (NO_x), sulfur dioxide (SO_2), volatile organic compounds (VOC), and ammonia (NH_3)).

4. What is the schedule for these area designations?

The Clean Air Act requires EPA to promulgate initial area designations within 2-years after the Agency sets a new national air quality standard or revises an existing standard. On **December 14, 2012**, EPA promulgated a revised primary annual PM_{2.5} standard strengthening it from 15.0 µg/m³ to 12.0 µg/m³.

- By **December 13, 2013**, state governors are required to submit and tribal leaders can submit, if they choose, their initial designation recommendations to EPA.
- By **August 14, 2014**, EPA will issue 120-day letters.
 - If EPA modifies a state's or tribe's recommendations, including area boundaries, the agency must notify the state or tribe by letter no later than 120 days prior to finalizing the designation.
 - States and tribes will have 60-days to provide additional information for EPA to consider with respect to a designation recommendation EPA plans to modify.
 - EPA also intends to provide a 30-day public comment period immediately following issuance of the EPA's letters responding to the designation recommendations from states and tribes.
- By **December 12, 2014** EPA intends to complete area designations.