

Fact Sheet — Final Area Designations for the National Air Quality Standard for Sulfur Dioxide
Established in 2010

ACTIONS

- On July 25, 2013, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identified or “designated” 29 areas in 16 states as “nonattainment.” This is the next step to implement the health-based national air quality standard for sulfur dioxide (SO₂) set in 2010. Air quality monitors in each of these areas have measured violations of the standard.
- EPA based these nonattainment designations on certified air quality monitoring data provided by the states as well as an assessment of nearby emission sources and weather patterns that contribute to the monitored levels.
- These areas will need to develop and implement plans to reduce pollution to meet the SO₂ standard.
- In most of these areas, EPA has accepted the state's recommendations. Where the Agency thought that changes to a state's initial recommendation were needed, EPA has worked with the state to revise the boundaries. No areas in Indian Country are being designated nonattainment as part of these designations.
- EPA anticipates designating areas for the revised SO₂ standard in multiple rounds. In this first round, EPA is only designating areas as nonattainment that are violating the standard based on air quality monitoring data provided by the states. The Agency does not have sufficient information to designate any area as “attainment” or make final decisions about areas for which additional modeling or monitoring is needed.
- EPA intends to address the designations for all other areas in separate actions in the future. With input from a diverse group of stakeholders, the EPA has developed a comprehensive implementation strategy for these future actions that focuses resources on identifying and addressing unhealthy levels of SO₂ in areas where people are most likely to be exposed to violations of the standard. The strategy is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/airquality/sulfurdioxide/implement.html>.

REQUIREMENTS FOR NONATTAINMENT AREAS

- Nonattainment areas addressed in this round include areas with monitors that violate a standard and the nearby areas that contribute to that violation. The Clean Air Act requires state, local and tribal governments to take steps to control pollution in SO₂ nonattainment areas. Those steps may include stricter controls on industrial facilities.

- State and local governments detail these steps in plans that demonstrate how they will meet the SO₂ standard. Those plans are known as state implementation plans, or SIPs. States have 18 months after the effective date of final designations to develop and submit their plans to EPA.
- Once designated, nonattainment areas are subject to nonattainment 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.
- Nonattainment areas are required to meet the standard as quickly as possible but no later than five years after designation. Six months after that date, EPA must determine whether the area has attained the standard. If EPA determines that an area has failed to meet the standard, the state has 12 months to submit a SIP revision that demonstrates that the area will attain the standard within five years of EPA's determination.

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. Areas not meeting the standard are designated "nonattainment."
- In June 2010, EPA set a one-hour, health-based national air quality standard for SO₂ at 75 parts per billion. The revised standard will improve public health protection, especially for children, the elderly and people with asthma. These groups are susceptible to health problems, including narrowing of the airways which can cause difficulty breathing and increased asthma symptoms, associated with breathing SO₂.
- In March 2011, EPA provided guidance to states and tribes for recommending nonattainment area boundaries for the SO₂ standard. EPA identified several factors and additional analytical tools, and other relevant information, to inform decisions on nonattainment area boundaries:
 - Air quality data
 - Emissions-related data
 - Meteorology (weather/transport patterns)
 - Geography/topography (mountain ranges or other air basin boundaries)
 - Jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., counties, air districts, reservations, metropolitan planning organizations)

- States and some tribes provided their initial designation recommendations in mid- 2011. Many of these were based on the most recent three years of air quality monitoring data – generally 2008-2010. In February 2013, EPA sent letters to state and tribal representatives responding to their initial recommendations for areas with monitoring data showing they were not meeting the SO₂ national ambient air quality standard. States and tribes had 120 days to comment on EPA’s modifications to their recommendations, and to provide new information and analyses to EPA, if appropriate.
- EPA also provided the public with an opportunity to comment on the Agency’s proposed modifications to the state and tribal recommendations for these areas with monitored violations and to offer additional information that could help establish the final nonattainment area boundaries for these areas.
- EPA is not yet prepared to issue proposed or final designations for other types of areas, including those areas for which additional modeling or monitoring is needed or for which states have requested attainment designations.
- EPA expects to issue a new rule to direct states to provide additional modeling or monitoring to inform future rounds of designations. EPA also expects to include in this rule an option for states to control source SO₂ emissions early in order to avoid nonattainment designations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on the designation process for the SO₂ standard go to EPA’s Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/so2designations>.