



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

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Ref: 8P-AR

AUG 18 2008

The Honorable Brian Schweitzer
Governor of Montana
225 North Roberts
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

Thank you for your recommendations on the status of fine particle pollution throughout Montana.

We have reviewed the December 11, 2007 letter from you submitting Montana's recommendations on air quality designations for the 2006 24-Hour PM_{2.5} standards. We have also reviewed the technical information submitted to support Montana's recommendations. We appreciate the effort your State has made to develop this supporting information. Consistent with the Clean Air Act, this letter is to inform you that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) intends to make modifications to Montana's recommended designations.

In your letter, Missoula County and Ravalli County were recommended for a PM_{2.5} nonattainment designation based on data from 2004-2006. EPA is making final decisions on the designations based on the most recent three years of data or 2005-2007. In this regard, we have enclosed information on the Montana Department of Environmental Quality exceptional events "flags" for wildfire impacts with EPA's concurrence. As a result, neither Missoula County nor Ravalli County had a violation of the PM_{2.5} standard for 2005-2007. Therefore, we are proposing to designate these areas as attainment.

We also acknowledge your request that we consider a one-year delay of our decision on nonattainment based on insufficient information for the Libby area in Lincoln County. In previous designations, insufficient information was considered as either missing or incomplete monitoring data. In the case of Libby, there is complete monitoring data that indicates the area is violating the PM_{2.5} standard for 2005-2007. Thus we are unable to provide a one-year delay. However, if Montana can provide complete, quality-assured certified data for 2008, showing no violation of the standard, EPA would reconsider the nonattainment designation for Libby. This data must be submitted prior to the effective date of the designations, which is 90 days after the Federal Register publication of the Administrator's decision. In addition, the Libby area can be redesignated to attainment if the 2007-2009 air quality monitoring data shows the area is attaining the 24-hour PM_{2.5} standard.

As you know, EPA has been very supportive and involved in the Libby woodstove changeout program. We recognize that air quality improvements have resulted. EPA remains committed to providing any available assistance so that Libby can attain the PM_{2.5} standard.

We have enclosed a detailed description of the Libby area where EPA intends to modify your state recommendations, and the basis for such modification. The Director of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Mr. Richard Opper, also will receive a copy of this letter and the enclosures. Should you have additional information that you wish to be considered by EPA in this process, please provide it to us by October 20, 2008.

Fine-particle pollution represents one of the most significant barriers to clean air facing our nation today. Health studies link these tiny particles – about 1/30th the diameter of a human hair – to serious human health problems including aggravated asthma, increased respiratory symptoms like coughing and difficult or painful breathing, chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function, and even premature death in people with heart and lung disease. Fine particle pollution can remain suspended in the air for long periods of time and create public health problems far away from emission sources. Reducing levels of fine-particle (PM_{2.5}) pollution is an important part of our nation's commitment to clean, healthy air.

You should also be aware that EPA is opening a 30-day public comment period on our intended designation decisions. We intend to make final designation decisions for the 2006 24-Hour PM_{2.5} standards by December 18, 2008. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or your staff may call Catherine Roberts, Particulate Matter Program Coordinator at 303-312-6025. We look forward to a continued dialogue with you as we work together to implement the PM_{2.5} standards.

Sincerely,



Carol Rushin
Acting Regional Administrator

cc: Richard Opper, Director, Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Judy Hanson, Administrator, Permitting and Compliance Division
Dave Klemp, Chief, Montana Air Resources Management Bureau

Enclosures (2)



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