

Additional Final Area Designations for the Annual Fine Particle Standard Established in 2012 for Areas in Tennessee

Action

- On, May 10, 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued initial designations for the 2012 primary annual national ambient air quality standard for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) for all remaining areas in Tennessee.
- EPA is designating 92 counties in Tennessee as unclassifiable/attainment. EPA designated the three other counties in Tennessee (in the Chattanooga area) as unclassifiable/attainment in a prior action in 2014.
- EPA and its partners at state, tribal and local air agencies are taking action to cut particle pollution. Efforts by air agencies 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 37%.

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. They then make recommendations to EPA for how all areas in the state should be designated. In today's action, EPA is designating areas as unclassifiable/attainment.
- In areas designated "unclassifiable/attainment," states will not have to take additional steps to improve air quality, but they must continue to prevent their air quality from deteriorating to unhealthy levels.

Background

- The Clean Air Act requires EPA to issue area 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 support a designation of nonattainment or unclassifiable/attainment).

- On December 14, 2012, EPA revised the national ambient air quality standard for PM_{2.5} by strengthening the annual health-based standard to from 15 µg/m³ to 12 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 area 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 factors, the EPA examined the role of directly emitted PM_{2.5} and emissions of the “precursor” pollutants that form PM_{2.5} (e.g., nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, volatile organic compounds, and ammonia).
- 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 notices signed by the Administrator on December 18, 2014, and March 31, 2015. The effective date of those designations was April 15, 2015. In those actions, the EPA announced it was deferring designation decisions for several locations pending review of additional information. Following those actions, designations remained deferred for three areas (covering 14 counties) in Georgia, 92 counties in Tennessee, the entire state of Florida (covering 67 counties), and Indian country located in those areas.
- On August 30, 2016, the EPA Administrator signed a final action promulgating initial designations for deferred areas in Georgia (covering 14 counties) and Florida (covering 62 counties), and areas of Indian country located in those areas. Following that action, designations remained deferred for two areas in Florida and the entire state of Tennessee, excluding three counties in the Chattanooga area.

Additional Information

- For more information on the designation process for the fine particle standards, go to EPA’s Web site at <https://www.epa.gov/particle-pollution-designations>.

