

**FACT SHEET**  
**PROPOSED DECISION**  
**OZONE NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARDS**

**SUMMARY OF ACTION**

- On July 13, 2020, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed to retain, without revision the primary and secondary ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The standards, established in 2015, are currently set at 70 parts per billion (ppb), in terms of a 3-year average of the annual fourth-highest daily maximum 8-hour average ozone concentrations.
- The Clean Air Act directs EPA to set primary standards to provide public health protection including for at-risk groups with an adequate margin of safety and the secondary standards to provide protection against adverse effects to the public welfare, including the environment and property.
- The existing primary standard (health-based) provides particular protection for children and others with asthma. Ozone in outdoor air increases their risk of asthma attacks while playing, exercising or engaging in strenuous work activities outdoors.
- The current scientific information continues to support the conclusion that the primary standard established in 2015 protects public health with an adequate margin of safety, including the health of at-risk populations.
  - The health effects evidence currently available continues to support the conclusion that ozone can cause respiratory system effects such as difficulty breathing and other respiratory symptoms. For people with asthma, these effects can lead to emergency room visits and hospital admissions. Exposure over the long term may lead to the development of asthma. People most at risk from breathing air containing ozone include people with asthma, children, the elderly, and people who are active outdoors, especially outdoor workers.
  - Information newly available in this review includes evidence of metabolic effects that comes primarily from animal toxicological studies. However, the currently available evidence continues to show respiratory effects associated with the lowest exposures. The proposed decision concludes that by focusing on protecting populations at risk of respiratory effects, the existing standard also provides protection from metabolic effects.
- The existing secondary (welfare-based) standard provides protection against an array of effects, including the effects of ozone exposure on vegetation.
  - The current welfare effects evidence continues to demonstrate that repeated exposure to ozone damages leaves, reduces growth of vegetation and has other harmful effects on plants and trees that have the potential to impact ecosystems and the benefits they provide. Ozone distributed globally also has effects on climate.
  - Information newly available in this review supports and expands our understanding on these and other effects on vegetation, ecosystems, and climate.
- EPA's independent science advisors, the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC)

reviewed documents in this review and advised the Administrator on several aspects of this review, including the standards.

- With regard to the primary standard, all seven CASAC members agreed that the currently available evidence was generally similar to that available in the last review when the standard was set. Based on this conclusion, six members of CASAC concluded that the primary standard should be retained. One member of CASAC expressed support for a lower standard.
- With regard to the secondary standard, all seven members of CASAC agreed that the current evidence supported retaining the current standard without revision.
- In reaching its proposed decision on the secondary standard, the EPA has also considered issues raised by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit Court in its remand of the 2015 secondary standard.
- EPA will accept public comment on this proposed decision for 45 days after the proposal is published in the *Federal Register*.

## BACKGROUND

- The Clean Air Act requires EPA to set national ambient air quality standards for “criteria pollutants.” Currently, ozone and related photochemical oxidants, and five other major pollutants are listed as criteria pollutants. The others are carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter and sulfur oxides. The law also requires EPA to periodically review, at least every five years, the relevant scientific information and the standards and revise them, if appropriate, to ensure that the standards provide the requisite protection for public health and welfare.
- Ozone, a key component of smog, forms in the atmosphere when emissions of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds react in the sun. Emissions from sources such as cars, trucks, buses, industries, power plants, and products such as solvents and paints are among the major man-made sources of ozone-forming emissions.

## HOW TO COMMENT

- EPA will accept comments for 45 days after the proposed decision is published in the Federal Register.
- Comments on the proposed decision should be identified by Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2018-0279, and may be submitted by one of the following methods:
  - **Online:** Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and follow the online instructions for submitting comments to Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2018-0279.
  - **Email:** Comments may be sent to [a-and-r-Docket@epa.gov](mailto:a-and-r-Docket@epa.gov). Include Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2018-0279 in the subject line of the message.
- Out of an abundance of caution for members of the public and our staff, the EPA Docket Center and Reading Room are closed to the public, with limited exceptions, to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Our Docket Center staff will continue to provide remote customer service via email, phone, and webform. We encourage the public to submit comments via <https://www.regulations.gov/> or email, as there may

be a delay in processing mail and faxes. Hand deliveries and couriers may be received by scheduled appointment only. For further information on EPA Docket Center services and the current status, please visit us online at <https://www.epa.gov/dockets>.

- For additional information, including the full EPA public comment policy, please visit <https://www.epa.gov/dockets/commenting-epa-dockets>

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

To download a copy of the proposed rule, go to EPA's Web site at:

- <https://www.epa.gov/ground-level-ozone-pollution/setting-and-reviewing-standards-control-ozone-pollution>
- Today's proposed decision and other background information are also available either electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov>, EPA's electronic public docket and comment system.
- For further technical information about the rule, please contact Deirdre Murphy, with EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, at (919) 541-0729 or [murphy.deirdre@epa.gov](mailto:murphy.deirdre@epa.gov).