

EPA REGION 10

Internal deliberative pre-decisional - FOR USE BY 2024 PRESIDENT-ELECT TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS ONLY

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA PM_{2.5} NONATTAINMENT AREA – OCT 15, 2024

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The Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) contains a persistent PM_{2.5} nonattainment area that experiences some of the highest PM_{2.5} concentrations in the nation. As a result of extensive efforts by the State of Alaska, Fairbanks North Star Borough, and the EPA, there have been significant improvements in air quality in the FNSB since the area was initially designated as nonattainment over a decade ago. However, wintertime PM_{2.5} levels remain well above federal standards. In 2023, the EPA issued a partial disapproval of Alaska's nonattainment plan. EPA anticipates Alaska will submit a revised plan in November 2024 that projects attainment by 2027.

UPCOMING MILESTONES:

- **Nov 2024** – Alaska plans to submit SIP revisions that respond to the EPA's 2023 disapproval.
- **Dec 2024** – The EPA plans to issue a proposed rule, acting on Alaska's SIP submission.
- **July 2025** – The EPA plans to issue a final rule finalizing action on Alaska's SIP submission, before the onset of sanctions triggered by EPA's 2023 disapproval.

- (b) (5), (b)(5) attorney-client

BACKGROUND:

- In 2009, a portion of the FNSB was designated nonattainment for the 24-hour PM_{2.5} standard.
- Exposure to elevated levels of PM_{2.5} can cause myriad health problems, including premature death in people with heart or lung disease, irregular heartbeat, and aggravated asthma.
- Wood combustion for residential heating is the primary contributor to the nonattainment problem. Past and current control strategies have focused on reducing woodsmoke through implementation of a curtailment program and a transition to cleaner fuels.
- Alaska relies in part on the EPA's standards for new wood heaters to reduce pollution in Fairbanks. Alaska has been highly critical of the EPA's implementation of the program and often cites its perceived shortcomings underestimating emission performance for delays in achieving attainment.
- The area failed to attain the standard by the Moderate Area attainment date of December 31, 2015 and was designated as a Serious Attainment Area in April 2017. Additionally, on September 2, 2020, the EPA determined that the area failed to attain by the 2019 Serious attainment date. The area was then subject to requirements for areas that failed to attain by the Serious area attainment date.
- On September 24, 2021, the EPA approved a few limited elements of the Fairbanks Serious Plan. On December 5, 2023, the EPA issued a partial approval and partial disapproval on the remaining elements required for a Serious nonattainment area that failed to attain by the Serious area attainment date. The EPA disapproved Alaska's plan, in part, because it did not implement all required emission controls. The EPA's disapproval (effective January 4, 2024) resulted in triggering the sanction clocks and transportation conformity freeze: 2:1

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offset NSR sanctions are effective 18 months after disapproval (July 4, 2025); federal transportation sanctions and federal plan (FIP) obligations effective 24 months after disapproval (January 4, 2026).

- In addition to core CAA programmatic funds, the EPA has awarded ADEC nearly \$42 million of Targeted Airshed funds to improve air quality in Fairbanks through funding for the woodstove changeout program and the removal and replacement of over 3,500 solid fuel devices.
- The EPA has also provided technical support to improve air quality modeling and better understand particulate matter formation during wintertime conditions in the Fairbanks nonattainment area.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Congress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> States | <input type="checkbox"/> Tribes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Media | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Federal Agency |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Government | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Local unions) | | | |

The State of Alaska is the lead for preparing and implementing SIP revisions in close coordination with Fairbanks North Star Borough.

MOVING FORWARD:

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- Since the 2023 disapproval of the Fairbanks nonattainment plan, Alaska has developed new regulations limiting emissions from several sources, written source-specific permits imposing BACT-level control on five major stationary sources, developed new contingency measures if the area fails to attain by the 2027 attainment date, and updated its air quality model with technical support from Region 10 and ORD. We are hopeful this updated control strategy will allow the area to reach attainment of the 24-hour PM_{2.5} (35 µg/m³) standard by the most expeditious attainment date identified by Alaska, December 31, 2027.
- On February 7, 2024, EPA lowered the *annual* PM_{2.5} NAAQS from 12 µg/m³ to 9 µg/m³. Current monitoring data indicates that Fairbanks exceeds this standard. Alaska is planning to recommend a nonattainment designation for the North Pole portion of the Fairbanks nonattainment area. This designation would be in addition to the current nonattainment designation for the 24-hour standard. We anticipate that implementing the current plan for the 24-hour NAAQS will also lead to emission reductions for the annual NAAQS.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: REGION10 ARD
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OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: OAQPS, OGC,