



REGION 9 ADMINISTRATOR

SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105

September 29, 2026

The Honorable David Apatang
Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
The Honorable Juan A. Sablan Memorial Building, Capitol Hill
Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, 96950

Dear Governor Apatang:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA or the Agency) intended approach for finalizing area designations for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands for the 2024 primary annual fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS or standard).

On February 7, 2024, the EPA promulgated a revised primary annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS of 9.0 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³).¹ The EPA's promulgation initiated the designations process in accordance with Clean Air Act (CAA) section 107, which is intended to identify areas of the country as either meeting or not meeting the NAAQS.² Under CAA section 107(d)(1)(A), the Governor of each territory was required to submit a list of initial designations for all areas in their territory by February 7, 2025. The EPA did not receive an initial designation from your territory.

On July 17, 2026, the Northern District Court of California ordered the EPA to publish final designations for all areas of the country no later than February 6, 2027.³ The EPA is appealing that court order. On November 24, 2025, the EPA filed a motion asking the DC Circuit to vacate the 2024 PM_{2.5} NAAQS thereby relieving the EPA of the obligation to make designations in furtherance of an unlawful standard. The D.C. Circuit of Appeals subsequently upheld the 2024 PM_{2.5} NAAQS, but on August 28, 2026, State and industry petitioners filed two petitions with the United States Supreme Court for writ of certiorari, seeking to appeal that decision. Absent relevant action from the judiciary, the EPA intends to finalize designations for the 2024 annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS based on the most recent monitoring data (2023-2025 data) and any other relevant information available at that time. The majority of Governors'

¹ 89 FR 16202 (Mar. 6, 2024).

² CAA section 107(d)(1)(A)(i)–(iii) defines: (i) nonattainment, any area that does not meet (or that contributes to ambient air quality in a nearby area that does not meet) the NAAQS, (ii) attainment, any area (other than an area identified in clause (i)) that meets the NAAQS, or (iii) unclassifiable, any area that cannot be classified on the basis of available information as meeting or not meeting the NAAQS. The EPA uses the category of attainment/unclassifiable for an area that is meeting the NAAQS and does not contribute to ambient air quality in a nearby area that does not meet the NAAQS.

³ *All. of Nurses for Healthy Env'ts v. Zeldin*, No. 26-cv-03118-HSG.

initial designations were based on 2021-2023 data. That being the case, we recognize that the EPA is evaluating two additional years of data beyond those that Governors had available at the time of their initial area designations submissions.

Our preliminary review of the 2023-2025 monitoring data indicates that your territory has no monitors with design values that do not meet the 2024 annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS nor does your territory include portions of multi-State Core-Based Statistical Areas or Combined Statistical Areas that have monitors with design values that may not meet the 2024 annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS. As such, the EPA intends to designate the entire territory of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as “attainment/unclassifiable” for the 2024 annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS.

If you have additional information that you would like the EPA to consider for final designations, please submit it to the public docket for these designations, EPA-HQ-OAR-2024-0078, located at www.regulations.gov. Submission of additional information no later than November 1, 2026, will help ensure the EPA has sufficient time to take this information into account in the Agency’s final designation decision.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at (212) 637-5000. Alternatively, you may have a member of your staff reach out to Anita Lee at (415) 231-4710.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL
MARTUCCI

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MICHAEL MARTUCCI
Date: 2026.09.29
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Michael Martucci
Acting Regional Administrator

cc: Zabrina S. Cruz, Director
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Division of Environmental Quality

Enclosure 1:

**Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' Initial Area Designation Submission for the
2024 Annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS**

Identified Areas	Identified CBSA	Commonwealth Initial Designation Category	Commonwealth Initial Designation Boundary	Does the territory contain a valid monitor with a DV that may not meet the NAAQS?	Is the territory part of a CBSA that has a monitor located in another State that may not meet the NAAQS?
Entire Territory*	N/A	No designation submitted	No designation submitted	N/A	N/A

*The EPA intends to designate the entire territory attainment/unclassifiable.