

Additional Air Quality Designations for the 2006 24-Hour Fine Particle National Ambient Air Quality Standards – Ak-Chin Indian Community and Gila River Indian Community

ACTIONS

- On October 19, 2012, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued final air quality designations of “unclassifiable/attainment” for the 2006 24-hour PM_{2.5} National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for the Ak-Chin Indian Community and the Gila River Indian Community. Monitoring data for each of these tribal lands for 2009-2011 show no violations of the standards.
- The EPA deferred final designation for these areas in November 2009 and February 2011 when the Agency designated all other areas of the country. The EPA deferred action on areas of Indian Country for these two tribes to allow for completion of the tribal consultation process. Tribal consultation is now complete.

BACKGROUND

- On October 17, 2006, the EPA strengthened the primary and secondary 24-hour PM_{2.5} National Ambient Air Quality Standards from 65 µg/m³ to 35 µg/m³, and retained the primary and secondary annual PM_{2.5} standards at 15 µg/m³. Numerous 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.
- The Clean Air Act requires the EPA to issue designations after the Agency sets a new standard or revises an existing standard.
- In June 2007, the EPA provided guidance to states and tribes for recommending nonattainment area boundaries for the 2006 24-hour PM_{2.5} standard. The EPA also used these factors and additional analytical tools, and other relevant information, to make final decisions on nonattainment area boundaries for the final designations identified in the November 13, 2009 action, the February 3, 2011 action, and in this action:
 - Emission data
 - Air quality data
 - Population density and degree of urbanization (including commercial development)
 - Traffic and commuting patterns
 - Growth rates and patterns
 - Meteorology (weather/transport patterns)
 - Geography/topography (mountain ranges or other air basin boundaries)
 - Jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., counties, air districts, reservations, metropolitan planning organizations)
 - Level of control of emission sources

- States and some tribes provided their initial designation recommendations in December 2007 based on the most recent three years of air quality monitoring data, generally 2004-2006. In August 2008, the EPA sent letters to state and tribal representatives responding to their initial recommendations for areas meeting and not meeting the 2006 24-hour PM_{2.5} standards. States and tribes had 120 days to comment on the EPA's modifications to their recommendations, and to provide new information and analyses to the EPA, if appropriate.
- The EPA also provided the public with a 30-day opportunity to comment on the Agency's proposed modifications to the state and tribal recommendations and to offer additional information that could help establish the final nonattainment area boundaries.
- After reviewing the additional information received, in December 2008, the EPA made decisions on area designations based on air quality monitoring data from 2005-2007. Because air quality monitoring for 2008 was nearly complete, the EPA agreed to evaluate the status of an area based on 24-hour PM_{2.5} air quality data from 2006-2008, if a state submitted complete quality-assured, certified air quality data for 2008 before the designations became effective.
- The December notice identifying areas as meeting and not meeting the standards was never published in the Federal Register. During an extended internal EPA review, 2008 air quality monitoring data for fine particle pollution were quality assured and certified by the states, and then used by the EPA to make final designations reflecting these data (i.e., 2006-2008 data).
- On November 13, 2009, the EPA designated 31 areas nonattainment for the 2006 24-hour PM_{2.5} standards based on 2006-2008 data.
- The EPA's evaluation of 2006-2008 air quality monitoring data indicated that monitors in three areas that had not violated the 2006 24-hour PM_{2.5} NAAQS based on 2005-2007 data were violating the standards based on 2006-2008 data. One of these monitors was located in Pinal County, Arizona. The EPA deferred designations for the newly violating areas to allow the EPA and the states and tribes in these areas to further evaluate data and to determine appropriate boundaries for area designations. Most of these deferred areas were subsequently designated on February 3, 2011; however, the lands of the Ak-Chin Indian Community and Gila River Indian Community were further deferred to allow for the completion of tribal consultation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on the designation process for the PM_{2.5} standards go to the EPA's website at <http://www.epa.gov/pmdesignations/>.