



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

OFFICE OF THE  
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

AUG 19 2014

The Honorable Eloy S. Inos  
Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
Juan A. Sablan Memorial Building  
Capital Hill  
Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands 96950

Dear Governor Enos:

I am writing to inform you of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) approach for completing the initial area designations for the 2012 annual fine particle National Ambient Air Quality Standard (2012 annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS) throughout the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Area designations are an important first step as we move forward to improve PM<sub>2.5</sub> air quality in the nation.

Although the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands has not provided the EPA with a recommendation, the EPA has reason to believe the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is likely attainment and is not contributing to nearby violations. Accordingly, the EPA intends to designate the entire territory of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as unclassifiable/attainment.

The EPA will make its preliminary designation decisions and supporting documentation available to the general public for review and comment. We will be announcing a 30-day public comment period shortly in the *Federal Register*. After considering the additional information we receive, the EPA plans to promulgate final annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> designations in December of 2014.

As background, on December 14, 2012, the EPA promulgated a revised primary annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS (78 FR 3086, January 15, 2013). In that action, the EPA revised the primary annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard, strengthening it from 15.0 micrograms per cubic meter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) to 12.0  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ; retained the existing 24-hour PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard at 35  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ; retained the existing 24-hour PM<sub>10</sub> (coarse particle) standard at 150  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ; and retained the current suite of secondary PM standards. The EPA revised the primary annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard based on an integrated assessment of an extensive body of new scientific evidence, which substantially strengthens our body of knowledge regarding PM<sub>2.5</sub>-related health effects. The revised primary annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard will provide increased protection for children, older adults, persons with pre-existing heart and lung disease, and other at-risk populations against an array of PM<sub>2.5</sub>-related adverse health effects, including premature mortality, increased hospital admissions and emergency department visits, and development and exacerbation of chronic respiratory disease.

The EPA designates an area as "nonattainment" if it is violating the 2012 annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS or if it is contributing to a violation of the NAAQS in a nearby area. Consistent with designations for previous PM<sub>2.5</sub> standards, the EPA intends to use a designation category of "unclassifiable/attainment" for areas that are monitoring attainment or do not have monitors, and that the EPA has reason to believe are likely

attainment and are not contributing to nearby violations. Additionally, the EPA intends to designate as “unclassifiable” those areas where the EPA cannot determine based on available information whether the area is meeting the NAAQS or where EPA has not determined that the area contributes to a nearby violation. At this time, the EPA is proceeding with intended initial area designations using quality-assured, certified air quality monitoring data from 2011 to 2013.

The EPA is committed to working with the states, territories and tribes to share the responsibility of reducing PM<sub>2.5</sub> air pollution. Current and upcoming federal standards and safeguards – including pollution reduction rules for power plants, vehicles, and fuels – will ensure steady progress to reduce PM<sub>2.5</sub>-forming pollution and will protect public health in communities across the country. We look forward to a continued dialogue with you and your staff as we work together to implement the 2012 annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS. Should you have any questions, please contact me, or have your staff contact Kerry Drake of my staff at 415-947-4157, or drake.kerry@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jared Blumenfeld". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "B".

Jared Blumenfeld

cc: Frank Rabauliman, Administrator, Bureau of Environmental Quality Control,  
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands