

Fact Sheet

TODAY'S ACTION

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today that San Diego County area in California attains the standard for fine particulates (PM_{2.5}). The attainment designation is based on data collected from the area's PM_{2.5} monitors for the years 2002 - 2004.
- EPA's original announcement of designations of areas throughout the country that met or violated the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for fine particulate pollution (PM_{2.5}) was made in December 2004. Those designations were based on data for the year 2001 - 2003. The federal program provided the opportunity for states to request a change in designation based on 2004 data. If these new data showed that the area attained the standard, EPA would change the designations for those areas.
- San Diego County submitted data for 2004 that showed that, based on data for the years 2002 - 2004, the area had attained the PM_{2.5} standard. EPA approved those data and San Diego's attainment status was changed from nonattainment to attainment.
- At present, three states in EPA's Southwest Region (Arizona, Hawaii and Nevada) meet the standard. Two areas of California (South Coast and the San Joaquin Valley) violate the standard.
- Areas designated as nonattainment have three years to develop plans showing how they will improve air quality. The Clean Air Act requires them to meet the national standard as soon as practicable. Deadlines for achieving the standards range from 2009 to 2014, depending on the severity of the particulate problem.
- Fine particulate pollution is a high priority for EPA. Although levels of particulate pollution have dropped nationwide from 1999 to 2003, regions that violate the standard continue to put people at risk for a range of serious health effects. Risks include decreased lung function, asthma, heartbeat irregularities, heart attacks and premature death.
- Today's action changing the designation of San Diego from nonattainment to attainment is a significant achievement that results from ongoing efforts by the county to control the sources of particulate matter and improve the area's air quality.

BACKGROUND

- The term "particulate matter" includes both solid particles and liquid droplets found in the air. Many manmade and natural sources emit PM directly or emit other pollutants

that react in the atmosphere to form particulate matter.

- The Clean Air Act directs EPA to establish, and periodically revise based on the latest science, standards for certain pollutants that pose risks to public health or welfare. The pollutants for which EPA has set standards are called criteria pollutants. EPA originally set standards for six criteria pollutants: carbon monoxide, lead, ozone, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide and coarse particulate matter (particles measuring 10 micrometers or smaller, or PM₁₀).
- In 1997 the Agency expanded this list to include fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) because health studies demonstrated the unique risks that fine particles pose to human health.
- Fine particles can be emitted directly (such as the smoke from a fire), or they can form from chemical reactions in the air. Those chemicals come from a variety of sources, including cars, trucks, buses, construction equipment, industrial facilities and power plants.
- The major constituents of PM_{2.5} are sulfates, nitrates and carbon compounds.
- In determining whether an area is meeting air quality standards, EPA relies on the average of three years of data from a nationwide network of air monitoring stations. An area may be designated as nonattainment two ways: 1) air monitoring data indicate the area's air quality exceeds national standards; or, 2) the pollution from an area is found to contribute to a violation in a downwind area.

REDUCING FINE PARTICULATE POLLUTION

- A recent report by EPA demonstrated that the U.S. has made progress in reducing fine and coarse particle pollution from 1999 to 2003. In 2003, fine particle concentrations were the lowest they have been since nationwide monitoring began in 1999.
- During this period, concentrations dropped the most in areas with the highest concentrations. For example, PM_{2.5} concentrations fell by 16 percent in Southern California.
- Despite these gains, reducing fine particle pollution continues to be one of EPA's highest priorities because of the widespread nature of this pollution and the seriousness of health effects associated with fine particle exposure.
- EPA is working to reduce fine particle pollution on a number of fronts. In May, EPA issued the Clean Air Nonroad Diesel Rule, which will significantly reduce particle-forming emissions nationwide from nonroad diesel equipment, such as equipment used in road construction.

- The Agency is also participating in the West Coast Collaborative, which works to reduce air pollution emissions from diesel sources along the West Coast. In partnership with other federal agencies, Canada, Mexico and state, local, non-profit and private sector partners, our goal is to reduce emissions from the most polluting diesel sources in the most affected communities and significantly improve air quality and public health.