

**U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY - REGION 9**

May 10, 2001

**FACT SHEET**  
**Notice of Proposed Rulemaking**  
**to Designate East Kern County as**  
**its Own Ozone Nonattainment Area**  
**with**  
**Attainment Date Extension**

**Today's Proposed Action**

- EPA is today proposing to remove eastern Kern County from the San Joaquin Valley Ozone Nonattainment Area and to create a separate East Kern County ozone nonattainment area.
- EPA is also proposing to set a deadline of November 15, 2001 for East Kern County to meet the federal 1-hour ozone standard.
- EPA is repropoing its finding that the *remainder of the San Joaquin Valley* failed to reach clean air by the November 15, 1999 attainment deadline and should have its air pollution status downgraded from serious to severe.
- Today's rulemaking responds to the approximately 400 comment letters EPA received after proposing, on June 19, 2000, to find that the *entire San Joaquin Valley* (including eastern Kern County) failed to reach clean air.

**Air Quality in the San Joaquin Valley & Eastern Kern County**

- Over the past ten years ozone levels in California have substantially decreased, but air quality in the San Joaquin Valley has improved more slowly. Monitoring data from 1997-1999 indicate that the San Joaquin Valley experienced 80 days over the 1-hour ozone standard, ranking it among the worst ozone regions in the nation. The majority of those exceedances were recorded in the southern part of the San Joaquin Valley.
- The San Joaquin Valley ozone nonattainment area is the largest nonattainment area in California, covering 8 counties and more than 22,000 square miles. More than 3 million people currently live in the nonattainment area, and this number is growing rapidly.
- Eastern Kern County is separated from the rest of the San Joaquin Valley ozone nonattainment area by the Sierra Nevada and Tehachapi mountains. Eastern Kern has low population density and encompasses approximately 2,700 square miles of arid desert. The last ozone exceedance in eastern Kern was recorded in 1998.

## **Ozone and Public Health**

- Ground-level ozone is not emitted directly into the air but is formed when nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) react in the atmosphere. The primary sources of NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs are cars and trucks, other gasoline and diesel-powered equipment, consumer and industrial solvents and paints, and oil and gas production.
- Exposure to even low levels of ambient ozone (smog) can cause respiratory symptoms such as a reduction in lung function, chest pain, and cough. Repeated exposure can make people more susceptible to respiratory infection and lung inflammation, and can aggravate pre-existing respiratory diseases.
- Children are most at risk from exposure to ozone because they are active outside, playing and exercising, during the summertime when ozone levels are at their highest. The elderly and those with respiratory diseases such as asthma are also at high risk.
- Long-term exposure to ozone can cause irreversible changes in lung structure, which can lead to chronic respiratory illnesses such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and/or premature aging of the lungs.

## **Opportunity for Public Comment and Impact if EPA Ultimately Finalizes Today's Proposal**

- EPA will take public comment on this proposal for 30 days following publication in the Federal Register. Comments should be sent by mail or e-mail to the contact listed below.
- If after public notice and comment EPA finalizes this proposal:
  - 1) The revised San Joaquin Valley nonattainment area would be reclassified to severe with a State Implementation Plan (SIP) submittal deadline of May 31, 2002 and an attainment deadline of 2005. EPA is also soliciting comment on an alternative 2007 attainment deadline.
  - 2) East Kern County would remain classified as serious with no new plan requirement and an attainment deadline of November 15, 2001.

## **Further Information**

- A copy of the proposal is available in the Air Programs section of EPA Region IX's website, <http://www.epa.gov/region09/air/>.
- For more information, please contact John Ungvarsky, U.S. EPA Region 9, Air Planning Office, at 415-744-1286; [ungvarsky.john@epa.gov](mailto:ungvarsky.john@epa.gov).