

Follow-up STAPPA/ALAPCO Survey on EPA's Air Quality System (AQS)

Earlier this year, STAPPA/ALAPCO conducted a short survey about the AQS data system to determine if a more comprehensive survey was needed. About half of the 25 agencies that responded indicated an interest in a follow-up survey. Based on these results, STAPPA/ALAPCO is planning a follow-up survey.

EPA staff are willing to work with STAPPA/ALAPCO in planning the survey and are proposing that the following topics be included in the follow-up survey in addition to those identified by STAPPA/ALAPCO.

1. Which agencies use AQS as their own data system.

OAQPS would like to get some additional info related to this question which was in the initial STAPPA/ALAPCO survey. We were surprised that about half of the 25 agencies that responded indicated that they use or rely upon AQS as their primary data system for air quality data. We hope that a follow-up survey would provide a boarder response from additional agencies. It would be good to determine if agencies plan to change their reliance on AQS over the next 3-5 years.

(Note: ECOS directors tell EPA senior officials that State agency reliance on EPA systems has been decreasing)

2. AQS Data accessibility for S/L/T agencies

We have recently received comments from external users about their difficulty in accessing detailed AQS data. We believe this is not an issue with S/L/T agencies but, if it is, we would like to find out. Any S/L/T agency representative can become a registered AQS user allowing them to obtain any data from AQS. We would like to know if agencies feel that accessibility to the AQS data base is an issue.

3. Timeliness of data in AQS

We have received some comments about the timeliness of data in AQS, particularly from data analysts who want access to more current (real-time or near real time) data. We agree that it would be good to have more timely data in AQS. Since data are uploaded into AQS as soon as they are submitted, the issue relates to how quickly the agencies who collect the data upload it to AQS.

Currently, agencies have up to 90 days after the end of a calendar quarter to submit their data to AQS for most data. This means that data collected in January does not have to be submitted to AQS until June. (In contrast, agencies submit data to AirNow on a daily basis). We would like to include some questions in the survey about reasonable schedules for submitting continuous and non-continuous data to AQS. Given the technology advances that have occurred since the reporting requirements were established, we believe that data can be submitted in a more timely manner.

4. Data analysis tools

We would like to determine if the data analysis tools that we provide in AQS meet agency needs. Most of the AQS data outputs (reports and work files) are based on input we have received from S/L/T AQS users over the past 10-20 years. We would like to know if these tools are providing the data that everyone (including data analysts) in the State and local agencies need.

5. Awareness of EPA efforts to standardize data across media

We would like some feedback about the degree agencies are aware of the direction that EPA (not just the Air Program) is taking on data exchange. For example, EPA has been working with the ECOS Directors over the past several years to standardize the flow of data between State environment agencies and EPA. All EPA systems must use common data standards (data elements) to promote data integration efforts; all data are envisioned to flow thru the Central Data Exchange (CDX), ultimately using XML. Further, EPA has offered as much as \$20 million annually in grant dollars over the past several years to assist State and tribal agencies (\$150-700k per grant) to pilot these activities. It is not clear if many State air offices are aware of the scope of these activities or of the available grant dollars.

We would also be interested in identifying those agencies that plan on using XML to submit AQS data after the XML schema is available later this summer.