



Environmental News

Two Connecticut Counties Included in a Multi-State Nonattainment Area for Fine Particle Air-Quality Standards

For Immediate Release: December 17, 2004

Contact Information: David Deegan, 617-918-1017

BOSTON - EPA today is designating Fairfield and New Haven Counties in Connecticut as part of a multi-state nonattainment area for EPA's Clean Air Fine Particle Air-Quality Standards. The multi-state designation encompasses the New York City metropolitan area, including ten counties in northern New Jersey and ten counties in downstate New York, where air quality monitors indicate that outdoor concentrations violate the annual fine particle standard. The remainder of the state of Connecticut will be designated attainment for the fine particle standard.

Fine particles, frequently referred to as PM_{2.5}, are less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter (approximately one-thirtieth the size of a human hair). Fine particles are unhealthy to breathe and have been associated with premature mortality and other serious health effects. These particles are derived from a variety of sources, including factories, power plants, trash incinerators, motor vehicles, construction activity and fires.

"EPA's continued implementation of the Clean Air Fine Particle standards is important so that New Englanders are better protected from fine-particle pollution," said Robert W. Varney, regional administrator of EPA's New England office. "Nationally, EPA is taking a multi-pronged approach to ensure that the air continues to get cleaner, including further reductions of pollution from fine particles. The State of Connecticut has also taken aggressive action to reduce power plant and diesel emissions. Together, these actions will achieve cleaner air for Connecticut residents."

Measures being taken by EPA that will help reduce fine particle pollution include tougher emission limits for power plants in the eastern U.S., more stringent tailpipe emission limits and cleaner fuels for all cars, light-duty vehicles (including sport utility vehicles and minivans) and diesel trucks, beginning this year. In May 2004, EPA issued its Clean Air Nonroad Diesel Rule that will cut emission levels from construction, agricultural and industrial diesel-powered equipment by more than 90 percent, which will help reduce fine particle pollution.

EPA is including Fairfield and New Haven Counties as part of the New York City nonattainment area based on consideration of several factors, including emissions, population, and traffic and commuting patterns. Compared to other New York and New Jersey counties in the New York City urban area, New Haven and Fairfield Counties have similar, and sometimes greater, levels for these factors.

The health standard for fine particles that is being exceeded in the New York City Metropolitan region is a year-round standard, with contributions during all seasons from many different wind directions. States with nonattainment areas must submit plans in early 2008 that outline how they will reduce pollution levels so they will meet the air quality standards. The deadline for meeting the standards will be 2010 for most areas.

EPA's nonattainment designations are based on air-quality monitoring data collected throughout the country between 2001 and 2003. In Connecticut, only one monitor, located in New Haven, recorded fine particle levels above the annual air quality standard. However, this monitor is located in an industrial section of the city, near an on-ramp to Interstate 95, and was determined to be a "hot spot" that does not represent population exposure in the New Haven area. However, even without a violating monitor in either New Haven or Fairfield Counties, other factors, such as emissions and population levels, were sufficiently high to qualify these counties for a nonattainment designation. Within the New York City Metropolitan area, there are several monitors that do violate the fine particle standard.

While fine particles are unhealthy for anyone to breathe, people with heart or lung disease, older adults and children are especially at risk. Exposure to elevated particulate levels can increase respiratory symptoms in sensitive individuals, can aggravate heart and lung diseases, and can cause premature death of people with cardiopulmonary disease and the elderly. In addition, fine particles are the major cause of reduced visibility (haze) in parts of the United States, including many of our national parks.

EPA issued the fine particle standards in 1997 after evaluating hundreds of health studies and conducting an extensive peer review process. The annual standard is a level of 15 micrograms per cubic meter, based on the three-year average of annual mean PM_{2.5} concentrations. The 24-hour standard is a level of 65 micrograms per cubic meter, determined by the 3-year average of the annual 98th percentile concentrations. Scientists, however, have not identified any "bright line" at which fine particle levels are not harmful to human health so it makes good sense for states to pursue voluntary measures that further reduce fine particle levels.

Today's announcement is part of a suite of Clean Air Rules the Bush Administration is adopting this year aimed at public health threats, including fine particles, ground-level smog, diesel exhaust, and mercury. The package of rules will produce more air-quality improvements in the next 15 years than the prior 30 years combined. In May 2004, EPA issued its Clean Air Nonroad Diesel Rule that will cut emission levels from construction, agricultural and industrial diesel-powered equipment by more than 90 percent.

Connecticut has already implemented a number of air pollution control programs which reduce fine particle pollution. These programs include power plant regulations, cleaner diesel fuel, retrofits of diesel engines and vehicle emission testing.

For more information on today's announcement, visit: www.epa.gov/region1/airquality/partic.html. National information on EPA's Clean Air Fine Particle standards is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/pmdesignations/>.

Release # dd-04-12 -15