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All Alabama Counties in Attainment of Clean Air Standard

MONTGOMERY - On December 14, 2012, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) significantly tightened the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), revising the standard from 15 to 12 µg/m³ (micrograms per cubic meter), averaged over a year. These particles are much smaller than the width of a human hair and are easily inhaled deeply into the lungs, causing a variety of health problems.

Upon finalizing a new standard, the Clean Air Act requires all counties in the U.S. to be formally designated by EPA as either an “attainment” area, which is an area in compliance of the new standard, or a “non-attainment” area, which is an area not meeting the new standard. On March 3, 2014, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management sent a letter to EPA stating that, based on recent ambient air monitoring data, all monitors in the State of Alabama meet the new annual PM 2.5 NAAQS. The letter recommends to EPA that the entire State of Alabama be designated as “attainment” for the new standard.

Several areas of the State, particularly the Birmingham area, have historically not met the standards which limit fine particle concentrations. The areas having met today’s stringent standards is a result of local, State, and federal emissions-limiting laws and regulations covering industry, vehicles, and other sources of air pollutants.

Nationally, air quality standards have become more and more stringent over the years, and even though overall air quality in Alabama has constantly improved, the Department has been pursuing an ever-changing standard. Due to a lot of hard work by ADEM and other stakeholders, the State of Alabama has attained this current, more stringent air quality standard for all 67 counties.

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