



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 7, 2024

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Breathe Project Supports the U.S. EPA's Decision to Update the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for Fine Particles (PM 2.5), Improving Overall Air Quality

Pittsburgh, Pa., – The Breathe Project supports the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) finalized rule that has updated the three-year average exposure standard for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for Particulate Matter (PM 2.5) announced today.

The new standard, based on the latest public health science, is an average exposure of 9 ug/m³ over a three-year period. The 24-hour exposure standard remains unchanged at 35 ug/m³. (The prior standard, last set in 2012, was 12 ug/m³).

The EPA's decision means that the entire Mon Valley – and just about all of Allegheny County – will not meet this standard based on preliminary PM 2.5 data from 2021 – 2023. Allegheny County will remain designated as a “non-attainment” region with these public health guidelines.

Nationally, this standard will save lives and improve public health. EPA estimates that the new standard will save [4,500 lives](#), avoid [5,400 cases](#) of asthma onset and avoid [270,000 lost workdays](#). This standard will also cut health costs. By 2032, strengthening the standard to 9 ug/m³ could result in public health net benefits of up to [\\$46 billion](#). President Biden, EPA Administrator Regan and Region 3 Administrator Ortiz deserve thanks for finalizing stronger particle pollution standards that will save lives and continue to reduce air pollution going forward.

In SWPA, our region's more than 2.6 million people have been at risk for far too long. This includes vulnerable populations who bear disproportionate risks from current levels of air pollution. Residents of the Mon Valley and Allegheny County deserve to live and work in communities without unfair risks to their health from toxic air pollution.

The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD), going forward, needs to produce stringent permits for major sources of pollution, like the U.S. Steel Clairton Coke Works, so that pollution levels are reduced to meet the new standard.

ACHD needs to insist upon continuous emissions monitoring systems for particulate matter (PM) for all major subsystems of large polluting facilities. This will ensure that major polluters, like the US Steel Clairton Coke Works, can be in compliance with the particle (PM) emissions limits.

U.S. Steel needs to be held accountable for improving the operation of the Coke Works so that people are not unfairly burdened by toxic air pollution.

Beyond the Mon Valley, annual averages at several official monitoring locations would violate this new annual standard of 9 ug/m³, including Avalon and Lawrenceville in Allegheny County; Kittanning in Armstrong County; Charleroi in Westmoreland County; and Johnstown in Cambria County.

The Beaver Falls monitoring location in Beaver County will be on the cusp of meeting the standard. This is notable because the current 2021 – 2023 data are largely without the Shell Petrochemical Plant's emissions – and the facility has not yet reached full production status. It is plausible that the Shell plant will drive Beaver County out of compliance with the new standard.

"Strengthening the PM_{2.5} annual standard from 12 µg/m³ to 9 µg/m³ will improve public health protection across the country and will make some progress in addressing disparities in health impacts among various populations," said John Graham, Senior Scientist at Clean Air Task Force. "This standard is similar to the Canadian standard of 8.8 µg/m³. However, we continue to believe that the available scientific knowledge—as indicated by the recommendation of a majority of EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee—supports a primary PM_{2.5} annual standard of 8 µg/m³ and a daily standard of 25 µg/m³ to protect public health from both typical and peak concentrations of PM_{2.5} and provide an adequate margin of safety."

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