

2/24/99

FACT SHEET

Reopening of Comment Period for the Findings of Significant Contribution and Rulemakings on Section 126 Petitions for Purposes of Reducing Interstate Transport of Ozone

TODAY'S ACTION

- ◆ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is announcing a limited reopening of the comment period for the proposed rulemaking concerning the Clean Air Act section 126 petitions (the section 126 proposal) for the purpose of reducing interstate ozone transport. EPA is reopening this comment period to allow comment on how the section 126 rulemaking may be affected by EPA's recent proposal to revoke the pre-existing 1-hour ozone standard for certain areas in States that have submitted 126 petitions.
- ◆ The comment period will remain open until March 26, 1999. The comment period will remain closed for all other issues.

BACKGROUND

- ◆ By notices dated September 30, 1998 and October 21, 1998, EPA proposed "Findings of Significant Contribution and Rulemakings on Section 126 Petitions and Federal Implementation Plans for Purposes of Reducing Interstate Ozone Transport," (63 FR 52213 and 63 FR 56292).
- ◆ The section 126 rulemaking is designed to reduce nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions that travel across the eastern United States and contribute to ozone nonattainment problems. The section 126 petitions request that EPA establish control requirements for groups of stationary sources which may also be subject to controls in response to a another rulemaking addressing the regional transport of NO_x, known as the NO_x SIP call.
- ◆ On July 17, 1997, following a lengthy scientific review process, EPA announced a new national ambient air quality standard for ground-level ozone. Specifically, EPA is phasing out and replacing the previous 1-hour standard with a new 8-hour standard that is more protective of public health.
- ◆ When EPA issued the revised ozone standard in July 1997, President Clinton issued a memorandum which outlined a common-sense implementation strategy for both the 8-hour and 1-hour ozone standard. One of the first steps for areas to take toward eventually meeting the new 8-hour ozone standard is to meet the 1-hour standard.

- ◆ Since the President issued the memorandum, EPA has made a final determination that the 1-hour standard would no longer be applicable to over 2,900 counties. EPA based these determinations on the three most recent years of ozone air quality data for each area.
- ◆ In December 1998, EPA proposed ten additional areas where the 1-hour standard would no longer be applicable based on 1996-1998 data. EPA expects to take final action on this proposal in the near future.
- ◆ Ozone is not emitted directly into the atmosphere. It is formed when emissions of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds react in the presence of sunlight. While beneficial in the upper atmosphere, ozone in the lower atmosphere can cause a variety of health problems because it damages lung tissue, reduces lung function, and adversely sensitizes the lungs to other irritants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ◆ Interested parties can download the comment period reopening notice from EPA's web site on the Internet at the following address: *<http://www.epa.gov/airlinks>*. For further information about the section 126 rulemaking, contact Carla Oldham of EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards at (919) 541-3347.