

June 21, 2001

FACT SHEET

EPA's OZONE FLEX GUIDELINES

Today's Action

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is issuing guidelines supporting state, local, and tribal governments' efforts to make voluntary, early reductions of air emissions that form ground-level ozone or smog. The Ozone Flex Guidelines encourage innovative efforts that are cost-effective, flexible, and make sense to local areas.
- High smog levels have been linked to increases in the severity of asthma attacks and other respiratory health problems, especially for children and the elderly. By working with mayors, governors and tribal leaders, EPA is encouraging localities to make decisions that will achieve cleaner air sooner.
- The Ozone Flex Guidelines will help enable areas to continue to attain the 1-hour ozone standard.

Background

- The Clean Air Act requires EPA to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ground-level ozone and five other major pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. (The others are particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and lead.) Every five years EPA completes an extensive review of the NAAQS to ensure that these standards protect public health and the environment.
- Ozone is an odorless, colorless gas composed of three atoms of oxygen. Ozone occurs both in the Earth's upper atmosphere, where it shields us from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays and at ground level where it is a harmful air pollutant. Ground-level ozone is formed when pollutants emitted by cars, power plants, and other industrial sources react chemically in the presence of sunlight.
- In 1997 EPA revised the 1-hour ozone standard to an 8-hour standard that provides public health protection for longer exposure periods. The Agency is moving forward to develop a policy to determine how best to transition from the 1-hour standard to the 8-hour standard.
- Using monitored air quality data and recommendations from state, tribal, and local air pollution control agencies, EPA determines if geographic areas of the country are in attainment (meet health-based air quality standard), or in nonattainment (exceed the air quality standard).
- About 70 metropolitan areas across the U.S. currently have ozone air quality below but close to the level of the 1-hour ozone standard.
- Many of these areas may wish to voluntarily adopt local emission control programs to

avoid air quality violations and the potential of mandated controls for both the 1-hour and 8-hour standards.

Ozone Flex Guideline Requirements

- Areas that have air quality meeting the 1-hour ozone standard set forth in the Clean Air Act are eligible to participate in the Ozone Flex Program. Some of these areas may violate or be close to violating the more protective 8-hour ozone standard.
- If an area has air quality that violates the older 1-hour standard, it does not qualify for this program because it needs to fulfill the requirements of the Clean Air Act.
- In order to participate in the Ozone Flex Program, state, tribal and local governments and EPA must develop and sign an intergovernmental agreement known as a memorandum of agreement (MOA).
- The MOA describes the local control measures the state, tribe or local community intends to adopt and implement to reduce emissions of ozone-forming air pollutants in advance of air quality violations.
- In the MOA, the state, tribe or local community agrees to prepare emission inventories and conduct air quality modeling and monitoring, if necessary, to support its selection of emission controls.

Benefits of Participation

- Areas that participate in the Ozone Flex Program will have the flexibility to institute their own approach in maintaining clean air and providing public health protection.
- Participants receive positive public reaction for voluntarily addressing air pollution problems ahead of federal requirements.
- Early, local controls can improve air quality in advance of EPA's designating areas as attainment or nonattainment for the 8-hour ground-level ozone standard.
- For a period of time (generally not to exceed 5 years), participating areas can avoid a "nonattainment designation," for the 1-hour ozone standard, while local controls address air quality conditions.

For Further Information

- For further information about the Ozone Flex Guidelines, contact David Cole of EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards at (919) 541-5565.
- The Ozone Flex Guidelines can be accessed from the Clean Air Act Amendments bulletin board of EPA's Technology Transfer Network (TTN) at the following Internet address: <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/oarpg>.

