

FACT SHEET

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY RELEASES GUIDANCE ON IMPLEMENTING ITS REGIONAL HAZE PROGRAM

ACTION

- On October 31, 2003, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the availability of two guidance documents relating to its regional haze program.
- The first document, “Guidance for Estimating Natural Visibility Conditions Under the Regional Haze Program”, is a guide for states to implement the regional haze program under the Clean Air Act. As part of the regional haze program, states will develop goals for improving visibility in each federally protected national park and wilderness areas known as “Class I areas.” States need to estimate natural visibility conditions in order to develop realistic goals for visibility improvement.
- This guidance document provides background on the regional haze program and discusses approaches for estimating natural conditions.
 - < One approach is a “default” approach, which is based on existing scientific literature about natural particle concentrations in the United States, together with geographic-specific information on relative humidity (which affects visibility impairment).
 - < The other approach is a general process for possible alternative approaches by which states may refine their default natural conditions estimates based on additional data and analyses. An example for one possible refined approach would involve updating the estimates of natural PM mass concentrations, which is more representative of the particular Class I area.
- The second document, “Guidance for Tracking Progress Under the Regional Haze Program”, provides states and other interested parties with a consistent way to evaluate changes in visibility impairment in federally protected national park and wilderness areas. These areas are known as “Class I” areas under EPA’s regional haze program.
- This guidance document provides background on the regional haze program and addresses a number of important issues for tracking progress in visibility improvement. These include:
 - < the methods for calculating visibility impairment using the particulate matter measurements from the national visibility monitoring network (known as the IMPROVE network)
 - < how to take into account the effect of relative humidity on visibility impairment calculations
 - < methods for selecting the 20% worst and best visibility days per year
 - < procedures for calculating visibility impairment for the 2000-2004 period, which is the

baseline from which future progress will be judged
< procedures for comparing baseline or future conditions to Class I area visibility goals in order to evaluate progress

- These two documents may be revised periodically without public notice. EPA welcomes public comments on this document at any time and will consider those comments in any future revision of the document.

BACKGROUND

- Haze is caused when sunlight encounters small pollution particles in the air. Some light is absorbed by particles. Other light scatters away before it reaches an observer. More pollutants cause more absorption and scattering of light, which reduces the clarity and color of what we see.
- These particles can occur naturally or result from human activity. The natural levels of these particles cause some visibility impairment even in the absence of any human influences.
- To reduce haze and to meet requirements of the Clean Air Act, EPA issued a regional haze rule in April 1999. The rule is aimed at protecting visibility in 156 federal Class I areas. EPA's previous visibility regulation, issued in 1980, addressed only local visibility impairment from local sources.
- Under the 1999 regional haze rule, states are required to set periodic goals for improving visibility in the 156 federal Class I areas. As they work to reach these goals, states must develop "implementation plans" that contain enforceable measures and strategies for reducing visibility-impairing pollution.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Interested parties can download the Guidance for Estimating Natural Visibility Conditions Under the Regional Haze Program and the guidance for Tracking Progress Under the Regional Haze Program from EPA's Web site: <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/oaqps>
- For further information about either document, contact Neil Frank at EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards at (919) 541-5560.