

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY - REGION 9

FACT SHEET
RECLASSIFICATION OF THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY
OZONE NONATTAINMENT AREA TO SEVERE

October 23, 2001

Today's Action

- EPA is today reclassifying ("bumping up") the San Joaquin Valley ozone nonattainment area from serious to severe because the area failed to attain the health-based, 1-hour National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ozone by its Clean Air Act deadline of November 15, 1999.
- This reclassification will assure continued progress toward attainment by triggering new requirements and deadlines. Although the bump-up to severe will give the San Joaquin Valley more time to attain, the area must revise its air quality plan and adopt more stringent controls.
- In addition, EPA is finalizing its finding that the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Management District failed to implement six measures in its federally-approved air quality plan. Implementation of these measures would control volatile organic compounds, a key component in the formation of ozone.
- EPA is also finalizing the designation of a separate ozone planning area for Eastern Kern County. The area, which formerly was part of the San Joaquin Valley nonattainment area, will retain its serious classification.

Air Quality in the San Joaquin Valley

- The reclassification to severe is occurring because air quality in the San Joaquin Valley has not improved as fast as required by the Clean Air Act. However, it does not signify that ozone air quality is worsening in the San Joaquin Valley. In general, over the past ten years ozone levels in California have improved greatly, but progress in the San Joaquin Valley has been slower.
- During 1997-1999, the San Joaquin Valley experienced 80 days over the 1-hour ozone standard, ranking it behind only Los Angeles, California's Southeast Desert, and Houston among the worst ozone regions in the nation. Thirteen monitoring sites in the San Joaquin Valley nonattainment area violated the federal ozone standard during that period. These sites are primarily located in the central and southern portions of the Valley.
- Ground-level ozone is not emitted directly into the air but is formed when nitrogen oxides (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) react in the atmosphere. The primary sources of NOx

and VOCs in the San Joaquin Valley are cars and trucks, other gasoline and diesel-powered equipment such as farm equipment, consumer and industrial solvents and paints, pesticides, and oil and gas production.

- The San Joaquin Valley nonattainment area is the largest nonattainment area in California, covering seven and a half counties and approximately 25,000 square miles. More than 3 million people currently live in the nonattainment area and this number is growing rapidly.
- During 1999-2000, Eastern Kern County did not experience an exceedance of the 1-hour ozone standard. The area is separated from the San Joaquin Valley by the Sierra Nevada and Tehachapi mountains, has a low population density, and encompasses approximately 2,700 square miles of arid desert. This area retains its "serious" classification and, if the air remains clean, it would be eligible to be redesignated to "attainment" of the ozone standard in 2002.

Health Effects of Ozone

- Exposure to even low levels of ambient ozone (smog) can cause respiratory symptoms such as a reduction in lung function, chest pain, and cough. Repeated exposure can make people more susceptible to respiratory infection and lung inflammation, and can aggravate pre-existing respiratory diseases.
- Children are most at risk from exposure to ozone because they are active outside, playing and exercising, during the summertime when ozone levels are at their highest. The elderly and those with respiratory diseases such as asthma are also at high risk.
- Long-term exposure to ozone can cause irreversible changes in lung structure, which can lead to chronic respiratory illnesses such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and/or premature aging of the lungs.

Impact of Today's Action

- California must submit a new attainment plan and additional severe area requirements by May 31, 2002. The plan must demonstrate that the San Joaquin Valley will meet the federal 1-hour ozone standard by November 15, 2005.
- The District must adopt and implement by November 15, 2002 the six measures committed to in the federally-approved 1994 State Implementation Plan (SIP) or revise its SIP; failure to address the nonimplementation finding within this deadline will trigger Clean Air Act sanctions 18 months after the effective date of today's action.

Further Information

- A copy of the notice will be published in the Federal Register in approximately 30 days. A pre-publication version of the notice as well as the supporting documentation will soon be available on Region 9's website: www.epa.gov/region09. For more information, please call John Ungvarsky at 415-744-1286 or ungvarsky.john@epa.gov.