



What Citizens Need to Know About National Ambient Air Quality Standards and Nonattainment

The federal Clean Air Act requires U.S. EPA to set national ambient air quality standards for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. U.S. EPA has air quality standards for the following criteria pollutants: carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), ozone and sulfur dioxide.

The pollutants of concern in Ohio are lead, nitrogen dioxide, fine particulate matter, ozone and sulfur dioxide. The Clean Air Act requires U.S. EPA to review air quality standards every five years to determine if they are still protective of human health and the environment.

When an area does not meet the standard, it is classified as being in “nonattainment.” This classification impacts businesses that want to locate or expand an air pollution source in that area. Once an area has three years of data showing that it meets the standard, the State must petition U.S. EPA to reclassify it as being in attainment.

The Clean Air Act gives U.S. EPA up to 18 months to act on a redesignation request. The area is not officially redesignated until U.S. EPA provides an opportunity for public comment and publishes the final action in the Federal Register. Only then is the area relieved of all requirements for nonattainment areas, including the requirement for new or modified facilities to obtain emissions offsets.

Ohio EPA monitors the air and analyzes the data to determine compliance with air quality standards. As of February 2018, Ohio EPA has 219 air monitors at 121 monitoring sites that check levels of sulfur dioxide, lead, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone.

Ohio EPA submits data and detailed plans to U.S. EPA to demonstrate compliance and the ability to maintain compliance.

Do Nonattainment Areas Affect Businesses?

If a facility potentially emits one of the criteria pollutants and wants to locate or expand in a nonattainment area, it needs to obtain emission offsets to ensure that air quality will continue to improve after it begins operations.

For every ton the company will emit, it must obtain more than one ton of emissions credits from a company that has reduced its emissions or is no longer operating. This rule is designed to ensure that a proposed large source of air emissions will not interfere with ongoing work to bring the area into attainment.

The process allows for new economic growth in nonattainment areas while decreasing emissions over time.

Attainment Status

Ohio’s attainment status can frequently change from attainment to nonattainment and vice versa as a result of U.S. EPA revising the air standards and promulgating new nonattainment areas and as a result of U.S. EPA redesignating nonattainment areas back to attainment after air quality meets the standards. Ohio’s current attainment status for each of the standards can be found at epa.ohio.gov/dapc/general/naaqs.aspx.

Contact

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