

EPA finalizes nonattainment designations for Utah counties

Designations will lead to plan to bring cleaner air to Wasatch Front

(Denver, Colo. – October 8, 2009) Utah Governor Gary R. Herbert, was notified today of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's final decision on the areas in Utah that do not meet the revised 24-hour fine particle standards (PM_{2.5}). These areas have been designated as "nonattainment" areas and will require action in order to achieve a common goal of cleaner, healthier air. This is the first time Utah has had PM_{2.5} areas designated as nonattainment.

EPA sent letters to Governors and Tribal leaders in August 2008 outlining the areas that did not meet the federal health-based fine particle air quality standard and invited comments for consideration. EPA evaluated the comments and additional data submitted before making these final decisions.

In December 2008, after closely reviewing recommendations from states and tribes along with public comments, EPA identified attainment and nonattainment areas based on air quality monitoring data from 2005 through 2007. The December 2008 designations were never published in the Federal Register and have been under review. Because the 2008 air quality data is the most recent, EPA used this data to make final designations.

"PM_{2.5} levels in Utah communities can have considerable impacts to human health. Designating areas as nonattainment will lead to the development of a plan to reduce air pollution emissions and bring cleaner air to the Wasatch Front," said Carol Rushin, EPA Region 8's Acting Regional Administrator.

According to the most recent state-validated air quality monitoring data several counties in Utah violated the 24-hour PM_{2.5} federal standard. Based on this data, EPA designated three areas in Utah as nonattainment. The areas are: 1) part of Utah County; 2) part of Cache County in Utah and Franklin County in Idaho; and 3) Salt Lake, Davis and parts of Weber, Box Elder and Tooele Counties.

EPA is required to designate not only violating areas, but nearby areas that contribute to those violations; thus explaining the inclusion of parts of Box Elder and Tooele Counties as nonattainment. These designations start a three-year process in which local and state officials develop and implement a plan to reduce PM_{2.5} pollution to levels that are healthier and in compliance with federal standards.

PM_{2.5} -- approximately 1/30th the size of an average human hair -- can aggravate heart and lung diseases and has been associated with a variety of serious health problems including heart attacks, chronic bronchitis and asthma. Sources of PM_{2.5} include fuel combustion from automobiles, power plants, wood burning, industrial processes and diesel-powered vehicles such as buses and trucks. In September 2006, EPA dramatically strengthened the fine particle standards to protect public health, tightening the 24-hour standard from 65 to 35 micrograms per cubic meter.

For additional technical information, please visit:

www.epa.gov/pmdesignations