

EPA PROPOSES TO STRENGTHEN SMOG STANDARD

On January 6, 2010, the USEPA proposed the strictest health standards to date for smog. Smog, also known as ground-level ozone, is linked to a number of serious health problems, ranging from aggravation of asthma to increased risk of premature death in people with heart or lung disease. The agency is proposing to replace the standards set by the previous administration, which many believe were not protective enough of human health.

The agency is proposing to set the “primary” standard, which protects public health, at a level between 0.060 and 0.070 parts per million (ppm) measured over eight hours. EPA is reconsidering the ozone standards to ensure that two of the nation’s most important air quality standards are clearly grounded in science, protect public health with an adequate margin of safety, and protect the environment. The ozone standards set in 2008 were not as protective as recommended by EPA’s panel of science advisors, the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC). The proposed standards are consistent with CASAC’s recommendations.

EPA is also proposing to set a separate “secondary” standard to protect the environment, especially plants and trees. This seasonal standard is designed to protect plants and trees from damage occurring from repeated ozone exposure, which can reduce tree growth, damage leaves, and increase susceptibility to disease.

In September 2009 Administrator Jackson announced that EPA would reconsider the existing ozone standards, set at 0.075 ppm in March 2008. As part of its reconsideration, EPA conducted a review of the science that guided the 2008 decision, including more than 1,700 scientific studies and public comments from the 2008 rulemaking process. EPA also reviewed the findings of the independent Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, which recommended standards in the ranges proposed.

EPA will take public comment for 60 days after the proposed rule is published in the Federal Register. The agency will hold three public hearings on the proposal: Feb. 2, 2010 in Arlington, Va. and in Houston; and Feb. 4, 2010 in Sacramento.

More information: <http://www.epa.gov/groundlevelozone>