

## Fact Sheet

### Status and Next Steps: Area Designations for the National Air Quality Standard for Sulfur Dioxide Established in 2010

#### ACTIONS

- On March 20, 2015, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) informed environmental commissioners of 28 states that certain areas within their states will be addressed in the next round of designations under the one-hour health-based national air quality standard for sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>). The standard was set in 2010 at 75 parts per billion (ppb). Air quality in parts of these states may be impacted by large sources of SO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In addition, air quality monitors in some of these states are measuring preliminary violations of the standard. EPA is also informing seven tribes that they may be impacted by nearby sources of SO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The EPA intends to designate these areas as either unclassifiable/attainment, nonattainment or unclassifiable by July 2, 2016.
- EPA will follow its standard open and transparent process to designate these areas and will work closely with states and Tribes to ensure that the decisions are based on the best available information.
- On July 25, 2013, the EPA identified or “designated” 29 areas in 16 states as “nonattainment” for the 2010 SO<sub>2</sub> standard. Air quality monitors in each of these areas measured violations of the standard based on 2009 – 2011 data. State plans demonstrating how these areas will meet the SO<sub>2</sub> standard are due to the EPA by April 4, 2015. At that time, EPA indicated that it intended to address designation for the remainder of the country in separate future actions.
- On March 2, 2015, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California accepted, as an enforceable order, an agreement between the EPA and Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council to resolve litigation concerning the deadline for completing the designations. The court’s order directs EPA to complete designations for all remaining areas in the country in up to three additional rounds: the first round by July 2, 2016, the second round by December 31, 2017, and the final round by December 31, 2020.
- In the designations to be completed by July 2, 2016, the EPA will designate two groups of areas:

1. areas that have monitored violations of the 2010 SO<sub>2</sub> standard based on 2013 – 2015 air quality data
    - a. Based on preliminary data, [EPA has identified 6 counties with monitors that are newly violating the standard.](#)
  2. areas that contain any stationary source not announced for retirement that according to EPA's Air Markets Database emitted in 2012 either (a) more than 16,000 tons of SO<sub>2</sub>, or (b) more than 2,600 tons of SO<sub>2</sub> and had an average emission rate of at least 0.45 lbs SO<sub>2</sub>/mmbtu.
    - a. [EPA has identified 69 sources that meet these criteria.](#)
- The court's order directs the EPA to complete an additional round of area designations by December 31, 2017 addressing areas where states have not installed and begun operating a new SO<sub>2</sub> monitoring network meeting the EPA's specifications referenced in the Agency's anticipated final titled, "[Data Requirements Rule for the 1-hour SO<sub>2</sub> primary NAAQS](#)". This rule would direct air agencies to provide data to characterize current air quality in areas with large sources of SO<sub>2</sub> through air quality modeling or new monitoring.
  - Lastly, the court's order directs the EPA to designate all remaining areas by December 31, 2020.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR NONATTAINMENT AREAS

- The Clean Air Act requires state, local and tribal governments to take steps to control pollution in SO<sub>2</sub> nonattainment areas. SO<sub>2</sub> is emitted by various types of industrial facilities, fossil fuel fired power plants and certain mobile sources.
- State and local governments detail these steps in plans that demonstrate how they will meet the SO<sub>2</sub> standard. Those plans are known as state implementation plans or SIPs. States have 18 months after the effective date of final designations to develop and submit their plans to EPA.
- Once designated, nonattainment areas are subject to nonattainment new source review requirements. New Source Review is a permitting program for industrial facilities to ensure that new and modified sources of pollution do not impede progress toward cleaner air.
- Nonattainment areas are required to meet the standard as quickly as possible, but no later than five years after designation. No later than six months after that date, EPA

must determine whether the area has attained the standard. If EPA determines that an area has failed to meet the standard, the state has up to 12 months to submit a SIP revision that demonstrates that the area will attain the standard within five years of EPA's determination.

## **BACKGROUND**

- The Clean Air Act requires EPA to issue designations after the agency sets a new National Ambient Air Quality Standard or revises an existing standard. Areas not meeting the standard are designated "nonattainment."
- In June 2010, EPA set a one-hour average, health-based national air quality standard for SO<sub>2</sub> at 75 parts per billion. The revised standard will improve public health protection, especially for children, the elderly and people with asthma. These groups are susceptible to health problems, including narrowing of the airways which can cause difficulty breathing and increased asthma symptoms, associated with breathing SO<sub>2</sub>.
- EPA is updating its March 2011 designation guidance for the 2010 SO<sub>2</sub> air quality standard to support analysis of designations and boundaries for these next rounds of designations. The updated guidance will be available shortly on EPA's website at <http://epa.gov/airquality/sulfurdioxide/guidance.html>.
- The EPA has also provided two technical assistance documents that provide advice on the use of modeling and monitoring data when determining if an area is meeting or not meeting the one-hour SO<sub>2</sub> standard. These documents can be found on the EPA's website at <http://epa.gov/airquality/sulfurdioxide/implement.html>.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

- For more information on the designation process for the SO<sub>2</sub> standard go to EPA's Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/so2designations>.