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The **Alert** newsletter provides monthly updates on transportation and air quality planning activities within the Delaware Valley.

February 2025

Air Quality

Pennsylvania Recommends New Nonattainment Area for the 2024 Fine Particle Pollution Standard

On December 19, 2024, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) issued a [recommendation](#) to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that certain areas of the Commonwealth be designated as nonattainment areas under the recently strengthened standard for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). The revised standard, which was finalized by EPA in February 2024, reduced the permissible annual concentrations of PM_{2.5} from 12 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) to 9 µg/m³ based on the three most recent years for which there is full quality-controlled data. In the DVRPC region, PADEP is recommending that Philadelphia, Delaware, and Montgomery counties be designated as nonattainment areas for annual PM_{2.5}. Under the previous standard, which was promulgated in 2012, Delaware County was the only portion of the DVRPC region to be designated a nonattainment area for annual PM_{2.5}, but it improved to become a maintenance area in 2019.

Under the Clean Air Act, EPA is required to set the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six criteria pollutants: carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide. Some standards differ based on the time period over which data is averaged. For example, PM_{2.5} concentrations are calculated on both an annual and a daily level.

These standards are based on extensive scientific research on how the pollutants affect public health and the environment, and EPA periodically reviews the standards to confirm they are still considered adequate to protect human health, including for sensitive populations such as children, the elderly, and people with asthma. For example, the strengthening of the annual PM_{2.5} portion of the NAAQS came as a growing body of scientific evidence regarding the effects of PM_{2.5} on human health called into question the adequacy of the 2012 standard. According to the EPA, particulate matter is an air pollutant that consists of a mixture of airborne solid particles and liquid droplets that can be categorized by the size of the particles. Coarse particle pollution (PM₁₀) is defined as particles with a diameter of less than 10 micrometers, while PM_{2.5} consists of particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter. Smaller particles pose a greater health risk because they can penetrate deeper into the lungs than larger particles. Sources of particulate pollution include vehicle exhausts, especially from older diesel models; concrete and other dusts from construction sites; rubber particles from tires; road dust; microplastics; and smoke and soot from wild and manmade fires, among other things.

The NAAQS, which apply to the background air quality, are distinct from emissions standards, which apply to specific sources of pollution such as motor vehicles or power plants. Furthermore, while NAAQS are based on health effects, emissions standards consider the availability of cost-effective control technologies. The determination of whether an area, such as a county or metropolitan area, is meeting NAAQS is based on readings from a nationwide network of monitors and computer modeling. An area that does not meet the national standards for one or more criteria pollutants can be designated as a “nonattainment” area and must submit a plan to EPA that outlines what actions the area will take to improve air quality. A former nonattainment area



Save the Date

Monday

March 31, 2025

**DVRPC New Jersey
Transportation and
Community Development
Initiative**

Application Period Closes

For more information visit:
<https://www.dvrpc.org/tcdi/>

Wednesday

April 30, 2025

**US DOT Maritime
Administration Port
Infrastructure
Development Program**

Applications Due

For more information visit:
www.maritime.dot.gov/PID
[Pgrants](#)

that is now meeting the standards can be designated as a “maintenance area.” States are required to submit plans to demonstrate how maintenance areas will continue to meet or maintain the NAAQS.

PADEP’s recommendation followed an examination of measurements from local air monitors that found that PM_{2.5} concentrations were highest in Philadelphia, but Delaware and Montgomery counties also had high densities of sources of precursor pollutants that contribute to the formation of PM_{2.5}. Ultimately, the density of sources in Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties in combination with the predominant wind patterns that tend to carry airborne pollutants northeast informed PADEP’s decision to include the three DVRPC counties in the recommended nonattainment area designation.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP) is currently submitting the nonattainment designations for the new PM_{2.5} standards and anticipates that these recommendations will be published on the NJ DEP website in the coming weeks.

Funding Opportunity

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Accepting Applications for Local Government Medium- and Heavy-Duty Vehicle Electrification Projects

This January, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) announced it was opening a new round of funding as part of its Diesel Modernization Program for projects that replace medium- and heavy-duty vehicles in use by local governments with electric alternatives. Examples of vehicle replacements eligible for reimbursement payments under the program, which is also known as WorkClean, include shuttles, transit buses, garbage trucks, dump trucks, and small Type A/B school buses. Projects replacing larger type C/D school buses are planned to be funded under a separate opportunity, the Electric School Bus program, which is expected to open in spring of this year.

According to [an overview document](#) released by NJDEP, the reimbursement amounts for each project are based on the type and class of the vehicles being replaced and are “designed to reflect the approximate incremental cost between a new electric vehicle and a new diesel vehicle plus the cost of a charging station.” The program also offers additional incentive amounts for overburdened communities and small governments that serve a population of less than 20,000.

The form to propose projects is now open and submissions will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, visit dep.nj.gov/stopthesoot/active-solicitations

The program’s \$35 million budget is being funded using a portion of New Jersey’s proceeds from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), which is a cooperative effort among several states in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic United States to reduce carbon emissions from power plants by establishing a regionwide cap on carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from power plants over a certain size and then requiring those power plants to purchase one of the limited number of allowances for each short ton of CO₂ they emit. The price of allowances is ultimately market-based through quarterly auctions for new allowances and secondary markets for existing ones. The revenue participating states generate from selling these allowances is then used to fund clean energy projects, bill assistance for ratepayers, and other beneficial programs.

According to a [fact sheet](#) released by the organization, RGGI “represents the first cap-and-invest regional initiative implemented in the United States.” Since 2005, the ten states currently participating in the initiative—Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont—have reduced power sector emissions by 50 percent while raising \$8.6 billion to fund investments in local communities. Pennsylvania is also a member of the organization, but its full participation is currently on hold due to litigation.



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