FACT SHEET

EARLY ACTION COMPACT AREAS -- EXTENSION OF DEFERRED CLEAN AIR ACT REQUIREMENTS FOR 8-HOUR OZONE NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARDS

ACTION

- On August 16, 2005, EPA deferred Clean Air Act requirements to reduce ozone pollution for 14 *Early Action Compact* areas from September 30, 2005 to December 31, 2006.

- EPA is working with areas across the country to reduce ground-level ozone, or smog, as quickly as possible. Together with EPA, these communities entered into agreements called *Early Action Compacts.* These Compacts give areas the flexibility to develop their own approach to meeting the 8-hour ozone standard, provided they achieve clean air sooner than the Clean Air Act would otherwise require.

- This voluntary program provides a flexible approach to reducing pollution to help 14 communities that did not meet the 8-hour ozone standard. As long as these 14 *Early Action Compact* areas meet agreed upon milestones to reduce ozone pollution in their areas, certain Clean Air Act requirements, such as controls on new sources, are deferred by EPA and will not apply.

- There are a total of 29 Early Action Compact areas in the country. Fifteen of these communities already meet the 8-hour ozone standard, but chose to join the compact in order to ensure that they stay in attainment and because they wish to take voluntary steps to protect the health and quality of life of their communities.

- Communities with *Early Action Compacts* are starting to reduce smog one to two years sooner than required by the Clean Air Act.

- EPA is taking final action on this deferral because the 14 areas met the milestone of submitting State Implementation Plans consisting of a strategy to reduce smog in their area. The plans all met the requirement to include all adopted control measures that demonstrate attainment of the 8-hour ozone NAAQS will be achieved by December 31, 2007.

- This is the second time EPA has deferred the date by which certain Clean Air Act requirements become effective for the *Early Action Compact* areas. EPA finalized the first deferral in April 2004 after the areas met a previous milestone.

- By reducing pollution ahead of schedule, these communities are bringing sustainable health and environmental improvements to their residents sooner than would have been achieved without these agreements.

BACKGROUND

- In April 2004, the EPA published a final rule designating areas of the country as either meeting or not meeting the ground-level ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), also called the 8-hour ozone NAAQS. If an area fails to meet health-based national air quality standards, the Clean Air Act requires an area to implement a number of efforts to improve air quality by a certain date.

- On June 2, 2005, EPA proposed to defer Clean Air Act requirements to reduce ozone pollution for 14 *Early Action Compact* areas from September 30, 2005 to December 31, 2006.

- The Clean Air Act requires communities with air pollution levels that violate – or contribute to the violations of – the national air quality standard for ozone to
  1) be designated as not meeting the standard,
  2) have an EPA-approved plan in place to correct the problem, and
  3) attain each standard by specific dates.

- *Early Action Compacts* require communities to:
  - Develop and implement enforceable air pollution control strategies,
  - Account for emissions growth, and
  - Achieve and maintain the national 8-hour ozone standard.

- *Early Action Compact* areas must attain the 8-hour ozone standard no later than December 31, 2007. Any compact area that does not meet the standard at that time will be designated as not meeting the standard, which will trigger the mandatory Clean Air Act requirements to reduce ground-level ozone.

- EPA will withdraw the deferral if an area misses any milestone set out in the *Early Action Compact.*

- Ground-level ozone – the primary component of smog – is formed in the atmosphere on hot, sunny days. The main ingredients of ozone come from cars, trucks, power plants, refineries and other large industrial facilities, and some natural sources.

- When inhaled, even at very low levels, ozone can:
  - cause acute respiratory problems;
  - aggravate asthma;
  - cause significant temporary decreases in lung capacity of 15 to over 20 percent in some healthy adults;
  - cause inflammation of lung tissue;
  - lead to hospital admissions and emergency room visits [10 to 20 percent of all summertime respiratory-related hospital visits in the northeastern U.S. are associated with ozone pollution]; and

- impair the body's immune system defenses, making people more susceptible to respiratory illnesses, including bronchitis and pneumonia

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- To download a copy of this notice, go to EPA's World Wide Web site at: http://www.epa.gov/ttn/naaqs/ozone/eac/index.htm#RMNotices

- Information on *Early Action Compacts* is available at http://www.epa.gov/oar/eac/basic.html