

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Region 1
5 Post Office Square, Suite 100
Boston, MA 02109-3912

December 9, 2011

The Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee
Office of the Governor
State House
Providence, RI 02903-1196

Dear Governor Chafee:

Thank you for Rhode Island's recommendation dated March 12, 2009, and updated October 21, 2011, on air quality designations for the revised 2008 National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone throughout the state. I appreciate the information Rhode Island shared with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as we move forward to improve ozone air quality. This letter is to notify you of the EPA's preliminary response to Rhode Island's recommendations and to inform you of our approach for completing the designations for the revised ozone standards.

On March 12, 2008, the EPA revised its national ambient air quality standards for ground-level ozone to provide increased protection of public health and the environment. The EPA lowered the primary 8-hour ozone standard from 0.08 parts per million (ppm) to 0.075 ppm to protect against health effects associated with ozone exposure, including a range of serious respiratory illnesses and increased premature death from heart or lung disease. The EPA revised the secondary 8-hour ozone standard, making it identical to the primary standard, to protect against welfare effects, including impacts on sensitive vegetation and forested ecosystems.

History shows us that better health and cleaner air go hand-in-hand with economic growth. Working closely with the states and tribes, the EPA is implementing the standards using a common sense approach that improves air quality and minimizes the burden on state and local governments. As part of this routine process, EPA is working with the states to identify areas in the country that meet the standards and those that need to take steps to reduce ozone pollution. Within one year after a new or revised air quality standard is established, the Clean Air Act requires the Governor of each state to submit to the EPA a list of all areas in the state, with recommendations for whether each area meets the standard. As a first step in implementing the 2008 ozone standards, the EPA asked states to submit their designation recommendations, including appropriate area boundaries, by March 12, 2009. In September 2009, the EPA announced it was reconsidering the 2008 ozone standards. The EPA later took steps to delay the designation process for the 2008 ozone standards pending outcome of the reconsideration. In September 2011, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) returned to EPA the draft final rule addressing the reconsideration of the 2008 ozone standards. On September 22, 2011,

the EPA restarted the implementation effort by issuing a memorandum to clarify for state and local agencies the status of the 2008 ozone standards and to outline plans for moving forward to implement them. The EPA indicated that it would proceed with initial area designations for the 2008 standards, and planned to use the recommendations states made in 2009 as updated by the most current, certified air quality data from 2008-2010. While the EPA did not request that states submit updated designation recommendations, the EPA provided the opportunity for states to do so. Thank you for the October 21, 2011 updated designation recommendation from Rhode Island based on the assessment of preliminary 2009-2011 air quality data.

As required by the Clean Air Act, the EPA will designate an area as nonattainment if it is violating the 2008 ozone standards or contributing to a violation of the standards in a nearby area. Consistent with designations for previous ozone standards, the EPA intends to designate an area as unclassifiable/attainment if there are certified, quality-assured air quality monitoring data showing the area is meeting the ozone standards or there are no monitoring data for the area, and the EPA has not made a determination that the area is contributing to a violation in a nearby area.

After considering Rhode Island's March 12, 2009 ozone designation recommendation, the updated October 21, 2011 recommendation, and other relevant technical information, including certified 2008-2010 ozone air quality data and preliminary 2011 ozone data, the EPA intends to designate the entire State of Rhode Island as unclassifiable/attainment. In order for the EPA to consider 2009-2011 air quality data in the final designation decisions for this area, Rhode Island must submit certified, quality assured 2009-2011 air quality monitoring data for the area to the EPA by February 29, 2012.

The EPA is committed to working with the states and tribes to share the responsibility of reducing ozone air pollution. Current and upcoming federal standards and safeguards, including pollution reduction rules for power plants, vehicles and fuels, will assure steady progress to reduce ozone-forming pollution and will protect public health in communities across the country. We look forward to a continued dialogue with you and your staff as we work together to implement the 2008 ozone standards. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or have your staff contact Anne Arnold of my staff at 617-918-1047.

Sincerely,



H. Curtis Spalding
Regional Administrator

cc: Janet Coit, Director, RI DEM
Doug McVay, Acting Chief, Division of Air Resources, RI DEM
Gina McCarthy, Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation, EPA
Steven D. Page, Director, Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, EPA