



Environmental News

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EPA REPORT SHOWS CONTINUING PROGRESS IN CLEANING NATION'S AIR

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EPA today announced its 21st annual urban air quality trends report showing continued progress in reducing six major pollutants over the 10-year period 1984-93.

The trends report shows the following improvements in atmospheric (ambient) air quality during the 10-year period 1984-93:

- Smog (ground-level ozone) levels dropped 12 percent.
- Lead levels decreased 89 percent.
- Sulfur dioxide levels fell 26 percent.
- Carbon monoxide levels declined 37 percent.
- Particulate (dirt, dust, soot) levels decreased 20 percent from 1988-1993 (the particulate standard was changed in 1987, so long-term data are not available).
- Nitrogen dioxide levels fell 12 percent.

"The Clinton Administration is committed to ensuring that every American can breathe clean air," said Carol M. Browner, EPA Administrator. "This year's trends report is encouraging news that our efforts are yielding real results."

When the Clean Air Act Amendments were passed in 1990, 140 million people were living in ground-level ozone (smog) non-attainment areas. Today, nearly 43 million of those people now live in areas that have clean air and are eligible for redesignation to attainment status.

EPA today also released 1993 air quality data showing that 48 of the 91 areas designated as "non-attainment" for smog under the Clean Air Act now have air quality meeting the standard. The 1993 data also show that 28 of the 38 areas designated non-attainment for carbon monoxide (CO) now have air quality data meeting the standard.

EPA cautions, however, that complying with the smog and CO standard is only the first step these areas must take in getting officially redesignated to "attainment." Attainment is a legal definition that determines whether an area is subject to cleanup requirements of the Clean Air Act. Before these areas can be officially redesignated to attainment, EPA must approve their state clean air plans as well as their plans to stay in compliance with the standards for the next 10 years. Until these areas get an official attainment

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designation from EPA, they are still subject to all pertinent requirements of the Act, such as programs for carpooling, clean fuel and auto inspection/maintenance. EPA plans to work closely with states and review their clean air plans (called state implementation plans, or SIPs) as expeditiously as possible.

The report data also show that 1993 was the second consecutive year in which no U.S. cities violated the nitrogen dioxide standard. Nitrogen dioxide is not only a health danger in itself, but is also a prime ingredient in the formation of smog, the nation's most pervasive air pollutant.

The report also lists the highest pollution readings for the six air pollutants in each of the 330 Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the United States, and shows air quality trends in 89 major metropolitan areas from 1984-93.

The 10-year EPA study, "National Air Quality and Emissions Trends Report, 1993," deals with six pollutants for which the Agency has issued national atmospheric standards, called National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). (These pollutants are regulated to protect Americans from respiratory illness under the Title I non-attainment provisions of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.)

The analysis in this report is based on data from some 4,000 air pollution monitors throughout the nation.

Under the Clean Air Act, Congress gave state and local governments the main responsibility for air quality monitoring, and these jurisdictions have traditionally used standard monitoring techniques approved by EPA. However, because the extent of monitoring networks varies from city to city, EPA feels that any ranking of cities by air quality is misleading.

(Limited copies of the air trends report are available to reporters from EPA's Press Office. Others can obtain copies from, and direct questions on the report to the Technical Support Division (MD-14), Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27711; phone 919-541-5558.)

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