

Ground-Level Ozone Nonattainment Impacts for the Austin Round Rock MSA

Ground-level ozone is a federally regulated air pollutant. It forms through a chemical reaction of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and volatile organic compounds (VOC) in the presence of heat and sunlight. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) revised its standard for ozone in March 2008. This more stringent standard reflects improvements in monitoring technology, and better addresses public health concerns.

Our region's current design value (the three-year rolling average of 4th-highest readings on which compliance is based) of 77 parts per billion (ppb) slightly exceeds the revised standard of 75 ppb. EPA could designate the region nonattainment for ozone as early as March 2010. We would likely be classified as marginal, the least severe category. A nonattainment designation has significant, and long lasting, implications for the region's transportation planning, economic development and quality of life.

Nonattainment requirements include: State and Federally enforceable state implementation plan (SIP) developed by TCEQ; transportation plans, programs and projects must pass transportation conformity reviews; nonattainment New Source Review requires offsets from industry; general conformity for federal projects and two 10 year maintenance plans for extended commitments after the area attains the standard.

Protection of public health is the primary reason for the more restrictive ozone standard. High ozone causes: irritation to throat and lungs, diminished lung capacity, aggravation of asthma or other respiratory problems. Increased health care costs and school absences occur. Exposure to ozone damages sensitive vegetation and trees.

Transportation conformity increases costs and time for conducting transportation planning. Difficulty in demonstrating transportation conformity can delay or eliminate transportation projects. The Federal Highway Administration can withhold federal transportation funding if an area cannot demonstrate transportation conformity or the state fails to produce an approvable SIP.

Economic development potential can be diminished by the negative stigma of a nonattainment designation. Diversion of resources to fund emission controls results in costs to businesses and the public. Nonattainment can place restrictions on business operations and expansion. General conformity requirements may affect some economic development.

Programmatic changes due to a nonattainment designation will require the state (TCEQ) to assume primary responsibility for developing a SIP for the area, thereby reducing local flexibility for planning. CMAQ funding will be made available to CAMPO for transportation-related air quality projects. The Near-Nonattainment funding may be reduced or eliminated.

Schedule

Milestone	Date
Revised Standard	March 12, 2008
State Designation Recommendations	March 12, 2009
Notification of State by EPA of Intended Modifications	November 2009
State Submits Response to EPA's intended Modifications	January 12, 2010
EPA Makes Final Nonattainment Designations	March, 12, 2010
SIP Due and Attainment Required for Marginal Area	December 31, 2013

2009 Ozone Season is important because EPA will use the 2007 – 2009 design value when making the final designation. If we monitor a 4th high value of ≤ 75 ppb in 2009, the area will likely be designated attainment. With an attainment classification, the area would continue efforts under the 8-hour ozone flex program – thus maintaining more local control.

2009 Ozone Season “Big Push” actions will provide both significant short-term and sustainable emissions reductions for achieving attainment in 2009 and maintaining the new standard thereafter. Activities include maximizing the effectiveness of public outreach, accelerating the implementation of elements of the 8-hour ozone flex program, and identifying and implementing additional cost effective emission reduction measures.