

EPA Finalizes the Transportation Conformity Rule PM2.5 and PM10 Amendments

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is finalizing changes to the transportation conformity rule that primarily affect PM2.5 and PM10 nonattainment and maintenance areas.

Key Elements of the Final Rule

The final rule provides clear guidance on how to implement transportation conformity under the 2006 PM2.5 national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) to ensure that transportation planning and air quality planning are coordinated and that air quality is protected.

Conformity will apply in 2006 PM2.5 nonattainment areas for this NAAQS on December 14, 2010, based on the one-year grace period for newly designated areas in the Clean Air Act and the transportation conformity rule.

The final rule also updates the conformity regulation to:

- include the requirements for demonstrating conformity for the 2006 PM2.5 NAAQS, including the regional emissions test(s) that would apply before and after SIP motor vehicle emissions budgets are established for the revised NAAQS;
- update the baseline year for the interim emissions test to calendar year 2008 in 2006 PM2.5 nonattainment areas;
- clarify which budgets PM10 nonattainment and maintenance areas would use for transportation conformity determinations, now that the annual PM10 standard has been revoked; and
- clarify that federally funded or approved highway and transit projects in PM2.5, PM10 and CO nonattainment and maintenance areas must not delay timely attainment or achievement of other interim milestones.

Background

Transportation conformity is a Clean Air Act requirement that ensures that federally supported highway and transit projects are consistent with state air quality implementation plans. Conformity helps protect public health through early consideration of the air quality impacts of transportation decisions in places where air quality does not currently meet federal standards or has not met them in the past.

Health and Environmental Benefits

The final rule improves the health and environmental benefits of the existing transportation conformity program by requiring new PM_{2.5} nonattainment areas and existing PM₁₀ nonattainment and maintenance areas to use conformity tests that ensure that air quality is protected in areas that need to attain or maintain federal air quality standards. The final rule also clarifies that hot-spot analyses are performed in a manner consistent with the Clean Air Act's public health and environmental requirements.

For More Information

You can access documents on transportation conformity on EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality Web site at: www.epa.gov/otaq/stateresources/transconf/index.htm

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