



Project Summary

The National Atmospheric Deposition Program/National Trends Network (NADP/NTN) SITE Visitation Program (October 1989 through September 1990)

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The proper collection of precipitation and the accurate measurement of its constituents are important steps in attaining a better understanding of the distribution and effects of "acid rain" in the United States. One of NAPAP Task Group IV's major programs concerns wet deposition monitoring. One of that program's projects, 4A-15, "Quality Assurance Support for Wet Deposition Monitoring," is sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to evaluate the sample collection process and provide technical assistance to the NADP/NTN network through a site visitation program. Research Triangle Institute, as contractor to EPA, conducts these visits. If deficiencies or nonstandard procedures are noted, the site operator and supervisor are notified. Brief reports are sent to the EPA Project Officer, the NADP/NTN Quality Assurance Manager, and others. In this way, necessary changes can be made promptly.

All NADP/NTN sites were visited in 1985-1986. A second round of visits began in October 1986, with the goal of visiting approximately one-third of the 200 sites each year over the next three years. This document is a summary report of the findings from the 1989-1990 (Fiscal Year 1990) site visitation program to 67 of the sites of the NADP/NTN network. In its present configuration, the network's research and monitoring programs are supported and operated by the U.S. Geological Survey; State Agricultural Experiment Stations; the Departments of Agriculture,

the Interior, Commerce, and Energy; and EPA. Additional support is provided by state agencies, public utilities, and industries.

Protocols and procedures followed in conducting the site visits are described. Results of systems and performance audits are discussed for siting, collection equipment, and the field support laboratories. Where exceptions are found, the potential effects of nonstandard siting, improperly operating equipment, and improper sample handling or analysis technique on the database are discussed.

This Project Summary was developed by EPA's Atmospheric Research and Exposure Assessment Laboratory, Research Triangle Park, NC, to announce key findings of the research project that is fully documented in a separate report of the same title. (See Project Report ordering information at back).

Introduction

The main report summarizes quality assurance assistance and findings from site visits made to the National Atmospheric Deposition Program/National Trends Network (NADP/NTN) precipitation collection stations for the period October 1989 through September 1990. Each site is located and operated according to protocols and procedures as given in the siting and operating manuals for the networks. The purposes of the site visitation program, sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are to verify that each site is operating within control limits and according to established proce-



dures, and to provide technical assistance as required.

Sixty-seven of the 196 sites (with duplicate sites bringing the total to 205) that were in operation during 1990 were visited during this timeframe. Figure 1 shows the NADP/NTN site locations.

Goals of the Site Visitation Program

The goals of the site visitation program for quality assurance assistance to the NADP/NTN collection sites are as follows:

1. Provide a qualitative assessment of each site and its surroundings, the operator's adherence to sample collection and analysis procedures, and the condition of the site's collection and analysis equipment through an on-site systems survey;
2. Provide a quantitative assessment of the operation of the precipitation collector and the accuracy of response of field and laboratory measurement devices for precipitation depth, mass, temperature, conductivity, and pH through an on-site performance survey;
3. Provide technical assistance to the operator by verbal explanation, minor troubleshooting, repair and calibration of equipment, and by making recommendations for sources of corrective action;
4. Prepare brief reports for each site detailing site characteristics, results of quality assurance tests, and technical assistance provided. Submit the reports to the NADP/NTN Quality Assurance Manager, the Central Analytical Laboratory's Site Liaison, and the EPA Project Officer;
5. Computerize results of information gathered from each site and submit this to the NADP/NTN Quality Assurance Manager on an annual basis; and
6. Document the sites and their surroundings by assembling a collection of site maps and color photographs.

Conclusions

Sixty-seven of the 196 active NADP/NTN precipitation collection sites were visited over the one-year period, October 1989 through September 1990. About one-third of the sites were visited during this fourth year of a four-year effort. The sites are located in all regions of the country and are sponsored and operated by numerous agencies. Each site is located

according to established siting criteria and operates according to published procedures. This report assesses the degree to which criteria and procedures are adhered; predicts, where possible, the relative impact on the data that might be expected from the variances found; and compares results thus far from the third round of visits to those documented in the second round of visits that occurred over the period October 1986 through September 1987.

Siting

Improvements in adherence to siting criteria were noted at most of the sites visited in 1990 that were not in compliance at the time of the second round of visits in 1986-1987. A number of sites had separated the collector and rain gauge to the prescribed 5-m distance and had oriented the collector's wet-side bucket to the west. Obstructions and sources of dust such as animals, parking lots, and chemical storage areas had been removed, or the site's equipment had been moved away from them.

For the 13 siting criteria summarized in this report, 45 of 67 sites (67%) visited in FY 1990 had at least one variance. Sixteen percent of the sites had three or more variances. However, most of the variances are expected to have minimal effects on the database because of the nature of certain criteria and/or the degree to which the criteria were exceeded. For example, network siting criteria require that the precipitation collector and rain gauge be separated by at least 5 m but not more than 30 m. Fifteen percent of the 67 sites did not meet this criterion, nine because of inadequate separation.

Sample Collection

Designated sample collection procedures were adhered to at almost all the sites in the network. All operators were careful not to touch the inside of the collection bucket or lid or contaminate the sample in any way. All site operators stated that they checked the sample for contaminants (leaves, bird droppings, etc.) at the time of the bucket's removal from the collector. This procedure was not being well adhered to at the time of the first round of visits.

To ensure accurate precipitation data, it is most important that the precipitation collector and rain gauge are properly working and well maintained. All sites were able to make a weekly equipment check. A properly working precipitation collector should uncover the wet bucket at the beginning of a precipitation event and re-

cover the wet bucket shortly after the event stops to keep matter such as dust out of the wet bucket when there is no precipitation. There were indications at 6 of 66 sites examined that the clutch on the Aerochem Metrics precipitation collector was wearing; however, all of these operated properly when tested with a 1600-g load. Seven of 62 sensors checked were not operating properly. Twenty-eight percent of the rain gauges (18 of 64) were found to be out of calibration by more than ± 0.1 in. at some point on the 0-12-in. scale, usually above a 5-in. depth. This is not believed to be a major source of error because the operator is instructed to empty the catch bucket before a 5-in. depth is reached. Calibration checks showed that 63 of the 65 gauges (97%) met acceptable calibration criteria (± 0.1 in.) over the range of 0 to 5 in.

Field Laboratory Procedures

Field laboratory procedures for sample handling, conductivity measurements, and pH determinations were being carried out properly and accurately in most cases. Proper procedures were discussed or demonstrated to site operators as needed.

Fifty-seven of 65 sites were able to determine the pH of an audit solution to within ± 0.1 unit of the designated value. Two sites had inoperative pH meters and could not be checked. Overall, 88 percent of the 65 field laboratories checked in 1990 agreed within ± 0.1 pH unit with the audit value.

For conductivity measurements, each of the 65 sites checked (100%) determined the audit solution's conductivity to within ± 4 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ of the designated value. Two sites had malfunctioning or broken equipment and thus could not be audited.

The solution balances were operating properly in all of the 67 cases checked. Of 67 balances checked, almost half agreed within ± 1 g with the designated weight over the range of 823 to 4938 g. All but three balances agreed within ± 5 g with the designated weight over the same range. In terms of percent variation with respect to weight, the worst case for any balance was 5.5 g at a loading of 4115 g, corresponding to only a 0.1 percent disagreement.

Recommendations

The site precipitation collector and rain gauge are central to the successful operation of the network. However, the equipment in the NADP/NTN network is aging and will require increased maintenance. Therefore, weekly equipment checks by the operator should continue to

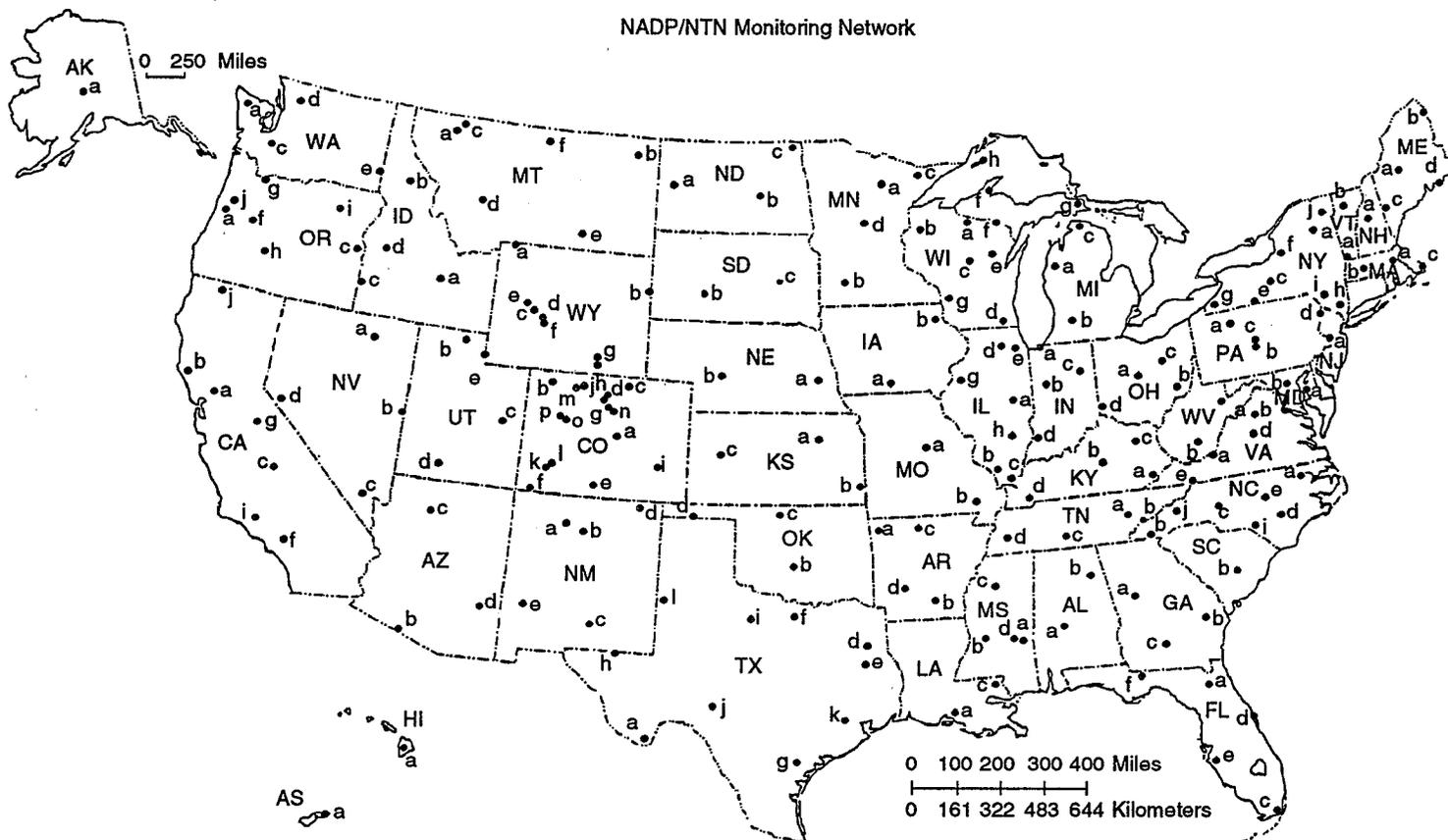


Figure 1. Active sites in the NADP/NTN monitoring network during 1990.

detect problems as early as possible. The collector's clutch assembly should be inspected for signs of wear. The failure rate of the precipitation collector's sensor heaters was still significant. A simple check of the collector's sensor heater, made by activating the collector with water and, after 5 min, lightly touching the sensor surface to verify it is heating, should continue.

A number of rain gauges were found to be out of calibration at some point in the 12-in. range. However, many of those calibrated in 1987 met specifications in 1990. It is recommended that a simple, on-site calibration check of the rain gauge be carried out every six months. A copy of the gauge chart used for the check should be forwarded to the network's Central Analytical Laboratory (CAL) for review.

Recommendations for improving site locations center on those siting criteria that, if violated, may affect the catch efficiency

or chemistry of the precipitation samples. Specifically, it is recommended that the NADP/NTN Coordination Office take the following steps to correct conditions at several sites:

- Relocate the collector or remove the obstruction (tree, etc.) that causes the 45° angle rule to be violated (five sites).
- Relocate the collector or restrict use of nearby parking lots and storage facilities so that a 100-m separation is achieved (five sites).
- Relocate the collector or install fencing so that animals are kept at least 30 m away (three sites).
- Relocate the collector so that transportation roadways and sources are at least 100 m away (one site).
- Reorient the collectors whose wet-side collection bucket faces north or

east so that all wet-side buckets face west (ten sites).

- Where expedient and inexpensive to do so, relocate collectors or rain gauges so that a minimum separation distance of 5 m is achieved (nine sites).
- Emphasize to site operators and supervisors that grass, weeds, and small trees or bushes should be kept at a height of 2 ft or less in a circle with a radius of 30 m from the collector (five sites).
- Level any collectors or rain gauges that are out of tolerance (three sites).
- Investigate whether or not the resistivity required to activate the collector sensor should be set closer to the factory value of 80K Ω for several of the collectors.

Table 1. NADP/NTN Site Measurements and Performance Survey Methods

| Site Measurement | Measurement Device | Performance Survey Method | Designated Performance Criteria |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Rain depth | Rain gauge (Belfort) | Challenge with known weights that simulate rainfall. | Agreement within ± 0.1 in. of test weight value over the range 0-12 in. |
| Precipitation sample collection | Precipitation collector (Aerochem Metrics) | Measure resistance across sensor, measure tension and drop of bucket lid, measure temperature and resistance of activated sensor. | Resistance in range of 60-90K Ω . Lid drop distance >3 mm. Sensor temperature ambient prior to activation; temperature of 50-70 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ after activation. |
| Mass | Triple beam balance | Challenge with traceable weights. | Agreement within ± 5 g of test weight value. |
| pH | pH meter and electrode | Challenge with simulated precipitation sample of known pH. | Agreement within ± 0.1 pH unit of test solution's designated value. |
| Conductivity | Conductivity meter and cell | Challenge with simulated precipitation sample of known conductivity. | Agreement within ± 4 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ of test solution's designated value. |

- Supply rain gauge damping fluid (silicone oil) to those sites that may need to fill reservoirs to within 0.25 in. of the top.

Site Survey Visits

A quality assurance systems survey was conducted at each site to qualitatively assess the site, its surroundings, and the operator's adherence to procedures specified in the NTN design document and in the NADP/NTN site operator's instruction manual. Criteria for siting an NADP/NTN precipitation station are illustrated in Figure 2. The operator was asked to demon-

strate sample collection and analysis procedures. These were observed with special attention given to calibration procedures and sample handling technique. Site equipment was examined for signs of wear or faulty operation. It was noted whether solutions and equipment were properly stored. Site logbooks and rain gauge charts (if present) were examined for legibility, completeness, and accuracy.

Information from the systems survey was entered in the systems survey questionnaire. Two sets of photographs (color slides) of the sites were taken. The N, E, S, and W views were photographed with

the precipitation collector in the foreground. Additional views were taken as specified in the questionnaire.

A quantitative performance survey was conducted at each site. Table 1 lists the equipment that was checked for performance and the type of test used. Criteria for evaluating performance are specified in the NADP Quality Assurance Plan.

This report was submitted in partial fulfillment of EPA Contract No. 68-D8-0001 by Research Triangle Institute. This report covers site visits made during the period October 1, 1989, through September 30, 1990. All work was completed as of September 30, 1990.

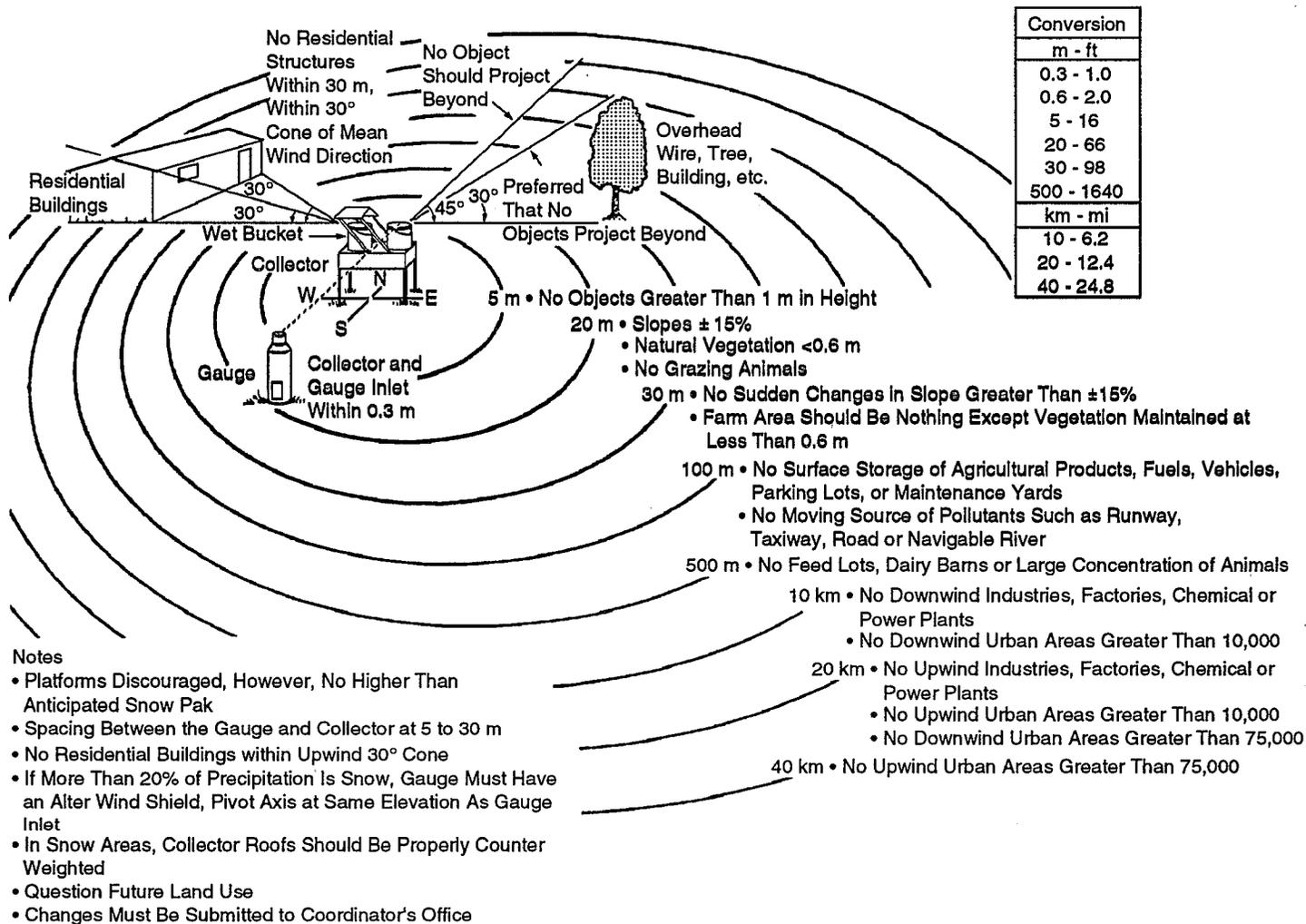
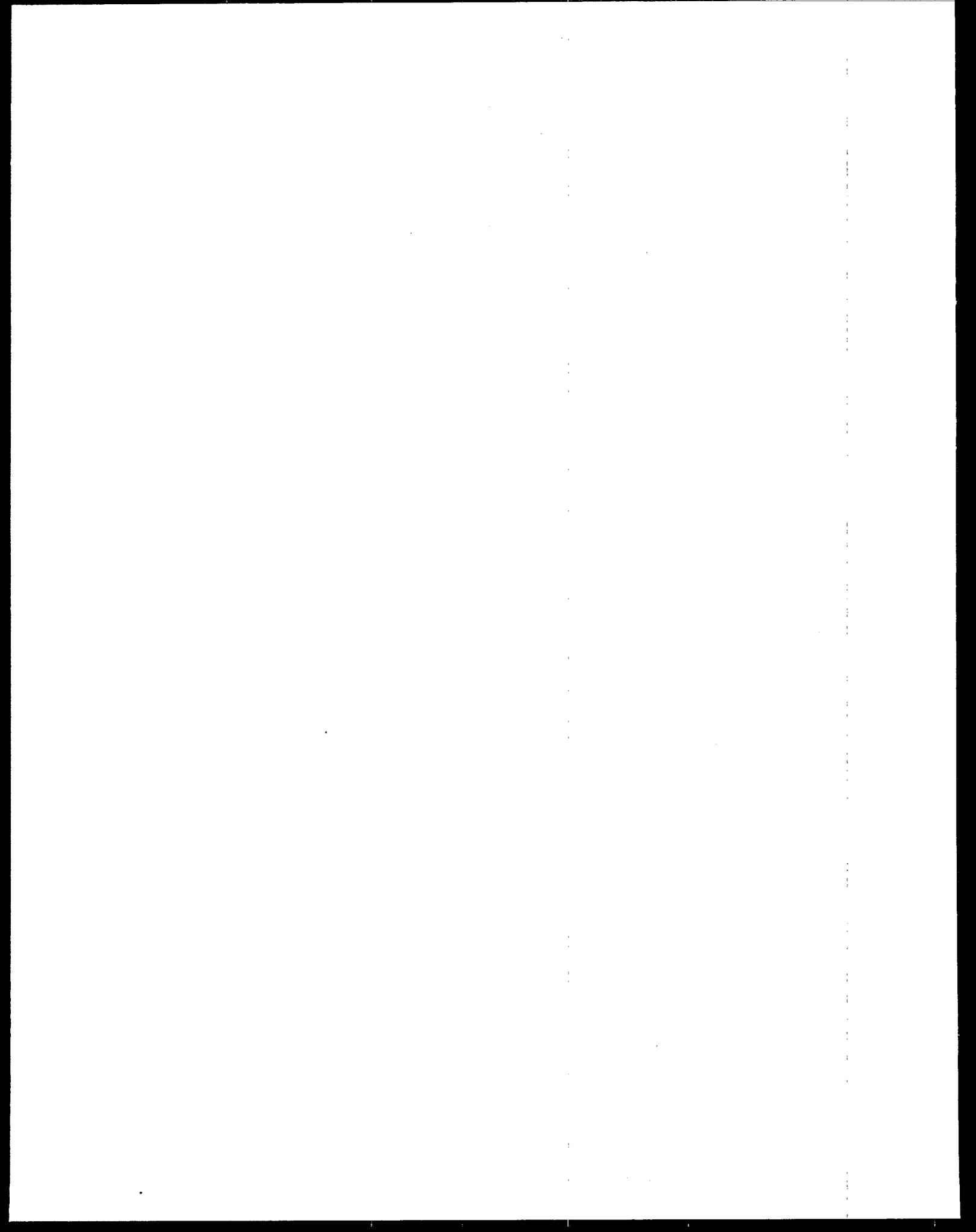
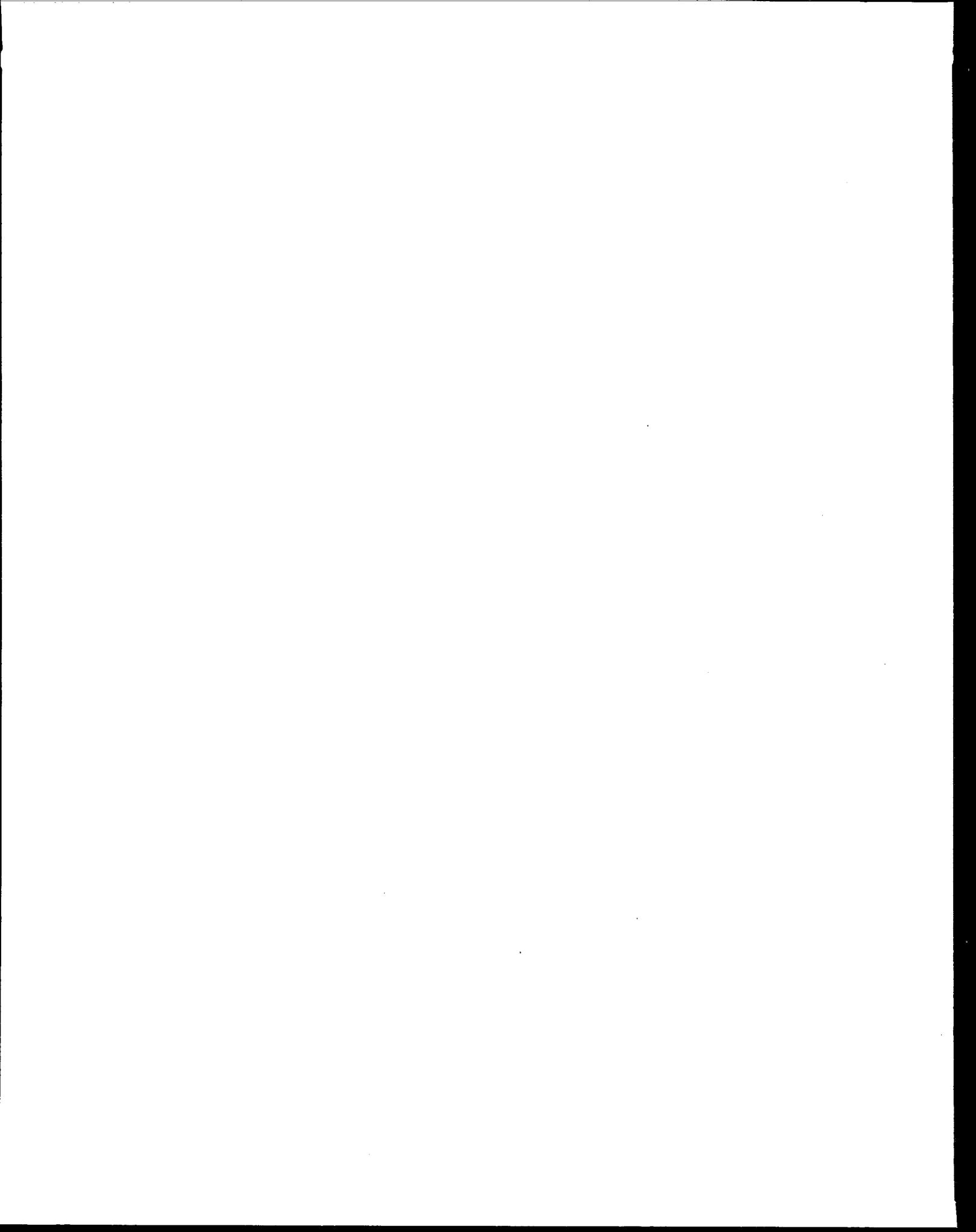


Figure 2. NADP/NTN siting criteria.





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*The complete report, entitled "The National Atmospheric Deposition Program/
National Trends Network (NADP/NTN) SITE Visitation Program for the Period
October 1989 through September 1990," (Order No. PB92-217 298/AS; Cost:
\$19.00, subject to change) will be available only from:*

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