

EPA Approves Request from Alabama to Relax the Summer Gasoline Volatility Standard for the Birmingham Area

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is issuing a final rule to relax the federal Reid Vapor Pressure (RVP) standard applicable to gasoline introduced into commerce in Jefferson and Shelby counties, Alabama (“the Birmingham area”). This change applies during the summer ozone season which runs from June 1 to September 15 of each year. This action amends our regulations to relax the summer ozone season RVP gasoline standard for the Birmingham area from 7.8 pounds per square inch (psi) to 9.0 psi. The state of Alabama’s request demonstrates that this change would not interfere with maintenance of the applicable national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) in the Birmingham area or with any other applicable requirement of the Clean Air Act.

Key Elements of the Final Rule

- This rule relaxes the volatility requirements for gasoline sold in the Birmingham area as described above, during the summer ozone season which runs from June 1 to September 15 of each year. Specifically, this rulemaking amends the federal RVP gasoline standard for the Birmingham area from 7.8 psi to 9.0 psi provided at 40 CFR 80.27(a)(2).
- This rulemaking is based on the EPA’s previous approval of Alabama’s state implementation plan (SIP) revision. The SIP revision demonstrated that relaxing the federal RVP gasoline requirement from 7.8 psi to 9.0 psi during the summer ozone season in the Birmingham area would not interfere with continued maintenance of the 1997 ozone NAAQS or any other applicable NAAQS, including the 2008 ozone NAAQS. Alabama submitted the SIP

revision with the noninterference demonstration to the EPA on November 14, 2014. The EPA approved the SIP revision on April 17, 2015 (80 FR 21170).

- Relaxing the volatility requirements for gasoline sold in the Birmingham area is beneficial because this action will improve the fungibility of gasoline in the Birmingham area. In other words, when this rule becomes effective and is implemented, the gasoline sold in the Birmingham area will be identical to the fuel sold now in the rest of Alabama. For motorists, the change, once implemented, in summertime gasoline volatility specifications will be virtually unnoticed.

Background

In 1987, the EPA determined that gasoline nationwide had become increasingly volatile, causing an increase in evaporative emissions from gasoline-powered vehicles and equipment. Evaporative emissions from gasoline, referred to as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), are precursors to the formation of tropospheric ozone and contribute to the nation's ground-level ozone problem. Ground-level ozone causes health problems, including damaged lung tissue, reduced lung function, and lung sensitization to other pollutants.

The most common measure of fuel volatility is RVP. To provide for cleaner air and greater public health protection, the EPA enforces maximum limits on the RVP of gasoline sold during the summer ozone season which runs from June 1 to September 15 of each year. Specifically, the EPA's regulations at 40 CFR 80.27(a)(2) establish maximum RVP standards of 9.0 psi or 7.8 psi depending on the state, the month, and the area's initial ozone designation with respect to the ozone NAAQS during the summer ozone season.

In order to relax the applicable federal RVP standard in an area where the more stringent federal RVP of 7.8 psi is required, an area must be designated as (or redesignated to) attainment. The area must also submit a maintenance plan demonstrating continued attainment of the ozone NAAQS with the less stringent RVP standard in place.

The Birmingham area has an approved 10-year maintenance plan for the 1997 ozone NAAQS and is designated as unclassifiable/attainment for the 2008 ozone NAAQS. As described above, the Birmingham area has demonstrated that it will continue to attain the ozone NAAQS, and any other applicable NAAQS, after the RVP standard has been relaxed from 7.8 psi to 9.0 psi during the summer ozone season.

For More Information

You can access the rule and related documents on the EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality Web site at:

www.epa.gov/otaq/fuels/gasolinefuels/volatility/index.htm

For further information on this final rule, please contact:

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