

EPA Approves Request from North Carolina to Relax the Summer Gasoline Volatility Standard for Mecklenburg and Gaston Counties

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is issuing a rule to relax the federal Reid Vapor Pressure (RVP) standard applicable to gasoline sold in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties, North Carolina. The two counties are part of the Charlotte-Gastonia-Salisbury, North Carolina maintenance area (“the Charlotte area”) for the 2008 ozone national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS). 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 Mecklenburg and Gaston counties from 7.8 pounds per square inch (psi) to 9.0 psi. Gasoline with RVP of 9.0 psi is already sold in the remaining Charlotte area counties. North Carolina’s request demonstrates that this change would not interfere with maintenance of the applicable NAAQS in the Charlotte area or with any other applicable requirement of the Clean Air Act.

Key Elements of the Direct Final Rule

- Once effective, this rule relaxes the volatility requirements for gasoline sold in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties, 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 two counties 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 North Carolina’s redesignation request and maintenance plan for the Charlotte area. The non-interference demonstration that accompanied the redesignation request

and maintenance plan demonstrated that relaxing the federal RVP gasoline requirement from 7.8 psi to 9.0 psi during the summer ozone season in the Charlotte area would not interfere with maintenance of the 2008 ozone NAAQS, or with any other applicable Clean Air Act requirements.

- North Carolina submitted the redesignation request and maintenance plan with the non-interference demonstration to the EPA on March 11, 2015. The EPA approved the redesignation request and maintenance plan on July 28, 2015 (80 FR 44873). The EPA also approved the non-interference demonstration on July 28, 2015 (80 FR 44868).
- This rulemaking removes the obligation to sell gasoline with an RVP of 7.8 psi in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties during the summer ozone season. Once effective and implemented, this rule would improve the fungibility of gasoline sold in North Carolina since the gasoline sold in the two North Carolina counties will be identical to the fuel sold now in the rest of the state. For motorists, the change in summertime gasoline volatility specifications would 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, or volatile organic compounds (VOCs), contribute to ground-level ozone. 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 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.

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.

For the Charlotte area, the state has approved 10-year maintenance plans for the 1997 ozone NAAQS and the 2008 ozone NAAQS. As described above, North Carolina has demonstrated that it will continue to attain the ozone NAAQS, and any other applicable NAAQS, after the RVP standard for Mecklenburg and Gaston counties 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 direct final rule, please contact:

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