

EPA Approves Request from Georgia to Relax the Federal Summer Gasoline Volatility Standard in the Atlanta RVP 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 sold in the 13 Georgia counties of Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, Paulding, and Rockdale (the Atlanta RVP Area). This final action amends EPA's regulations to relax the RVP standard from 7.8 pounds per square inch (psi) to 9.0 psi for gasoline sold during the summer ozone season.

EPA is acting on a request made by Georgia to relax the RVP standard applicable to gasoline introduced into commerce during the summer fuel season, as described further below. On May 14, 2019, EPA published a notice of proposed rulemaking for today's final rule. EPA received two comments that sought an effective compliance date of June 1, 2020. EPA is finalizing the RVP relaxation rulemaking with a legally effective date after September 15, 2019. The first relaxed RVP compliance date will effectively be June 1, 2020. EPA also received one comment outside the scope of the rulemaking.

Key Elements of the Final Rule

- This final rule relaxes the volatility requirements for gasoline sold in the Atlanta RVP Area, during the summer ozone season which runs from June 1 to September 15 of each year. Specifically, this final rule amends the federal RVP gasoline standard for the 13 counties in the Atlanta RVP Area from 7.8 psi to 9.0 psi provided at 40 CFR 80.27(a)(2).

- Starting on June 1, 2020, gasoline introduced into commerce in the Atlanta RVP Area during the summer ozone season will no longer be subject to the federal RVP requirement of 7.8 psi and must instead meet the federal 9.0 psi requirement.
- This final rule is in response to an August 15, 2018 request from Georgia that included a section 175A maintenance plan revision and CAA section 110(l) non-interference demonstration to EPA. EPA proposed to approve the maintenance plan revision and demonstration on February 12, 2019 (84 FR 3358) and finalized that approval on April 23, 2019 (84 FR 16786) based upon its determination that the proposed change to the federal gasoline RVP regulations for the Atlanta RVP Area will not interfere with the continued maintenance of the 2008 ozone national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS), the timely attainment of the 2015 ozone NAAQS, or any other applicable provisions of the CAA.
- Relaxing the volatility requirements for gasoline sold in the Atlanta RVP Area could be beneficial because this action will improve the fungibility of gasoline in Georgia. The gasoline sold in the Atlanta RVP Area can be identical to the fuel now sold in the rest of Georgia. For motorists, the change in summertime gasoline volatility specifications would be virtually unnoticed.

Background

In 1987, 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, 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, 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.

To relax the applicable federal RVP standard in an area where the more stringent federal RVP of 7.8 psi is required, an area should be designated as (or redesignated to) attainment. If the redesignated area is still covered by a Clean Air Act (CAA) section 175A maintenance plan, then it must also submit a revised maintenance plan demonstrating continued attainment of the ozone NAAQS with the less stringent RVP standard in place. EPA also believes it appropriate to approve an RVP relaxation in an area that is nonattainment for an ozone NAAQS if the state demonstrates that the area would timely attain the ozone NAAQS and provides any new necessary measures to control emissions to offset the change in VOC and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions.

The 13 counties covered by this final rule (the Atlanta RVP Area) are part of a 15-county area that was redesignated to attainment for the 2008 ozone NAAQS on June 2, 2017 (82 FR 25523). Seven counties of the Atlanta RVP Area have been designated nonattainment for the more stringent 2015 ozone NAAQS on June 4, 2018 (83 FR 25776). When the ozone nonattainment area was redesignated to attainment for the 2008 ozone NAAQS, the State assumed 7.8 RVP summertime fuel as part of its maintenance plan. For EPA to act on Georgia's subsequent request to relax the summertime RVP requirement from 7.8 psi to 9.0 psi, the State needed to revise the approved CAA section 175A maintenance plan and submit a section 110(l) noninterference demonstration for the 2008 ozone maintenance area showing that the higher RVP fuel would not interfere with the area's ability to maintain attainment of the standard or any other applicable CAA requirements. Georgia was also required to address the 2015 ozone NAAQS in the section 110(l) noninterference demonstration to demonstrate that the higher RVP fuel would not interfere with the area's ability to timely attain the standard or any other applicable CAA requirements.

For More Information

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

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

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