

State Wants Epa's Clean Air Status Dane, Other Counties Meet Standards, Doyle Says

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Take a deep breath. Dane County's air now complies with federal fine-particle pollution standards, officials said Friday. Gov. Jim Doyle has asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to remove Dane, Columbia and Brown counties from the list of 211 counties in 25 states that don't comply with federal air pollution standards.

Dane County made the list for the first time in December after the EPA tightened its standards in 2006. But new data from 2008 showed the three-year average of fine-particle pollution is below the new limit. Fine-particle pollution is generated largely by emissions from vehicles and power plants and can cause health problems for children, seniors and those with respiratory problems.

Meeting the EPA standards is good news for public health reasons, but it also means businesses seeking to locate in Dane County won't be burdened by mandatory regulations to reduce air pollution, said Dave Merritt, head of the Dane County Clean Air Coalition. Dane County's fine-particle pollution levels are still close to the EPA limit of 35 micrograms per cubic meter. The Department of Natural Resources measured an average level in Dane County of 34 micrograms per cubic meter from 2006 through 2008. The level between 2005 and 2007 was 37 micrograms per cubic meter.

Merritt said air pollution levels were much lower in 2008, possibly because of weather patterns, high gas prices - which reduced the amount of driving - and power plant regulations the state has implemented in recent years. But the past month has seen three Clean Air Action Day alerts, which are issued when fine-particle pollution levels are elevated. Merritt urged the public to continue taking steps to reduce their emissions and energy consumption.

To help with that effort, local businesses can take advantage of a new initiative called the Healthy Air Employer Network, which also was announced Friday. The network is geared toward helping companies implement practices such as cleaner commutes for employees.

Employers can sign up to be a member of the network at www.healthyairedane.org.