

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **GOOD DANE COUNTY AIR QUALITY IN 2008 LIKELY TO REVERSE EPA DESIGNATION**

Dane County's air quality in 2008 has been very good so far, and if the air quality remains good through the final ten days of the year, Dane County will steer clear of a final "non-attainment area" designation for fine particle pollution from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), according to the Dane County Clean Air Coalition (CAC).

"Since today's EPA decision designating Dane County a non-attainment area won't become effective until early April 2009, EPA has importantly decided to in the interim consider 2008 air monitoring data," said Dave Merritt, Project Coordinator of the Dane County Clean Air Coalition. "If today was New Year's Eve, 2006-2008 air quality data would show Dane County in compliance with federal clean air standards," said Merritt. Absent a major weather event creating a 'storm' of fine particle pollution, we are optimistic that by April Dane County will be taken off the final list of non-attainment counties."

In a letter to Governor Jim Doyle on Monday, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, designated six Wisconsin counties, including Dane and Columbia counties, as nonattainment areas under new and more stringent federal fine particle standards put in place in September 2006. EPA designated 211 counties in 25 states as nonattainment areas.

Wintertime episodes of high levels of fine particle pollution occur when warmer air from the south or southwest blows over cold ground or a snow cover. This forms a strong temperature inversion close to the ground that traps pollutants. Wintertime episode days are characterized by fog, temperatures in the 30s with light winds. Fine particles is a complex mixture of extremely small particles with a diameter less than 2.5 microns – about 1/30<sup>th</sup> the diameter of a human hair. Major contributors to fine particle pollution include diesel trucks, passenger cars, off-road equipment, electric power generation, open burning and agricultural sources.

EPA adopted new regulations lowering the fine particle standard from 65 micrograms per cubic meter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) to 35  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . The standard was revised based on a number of health studies showing that short-term exposure to fine particle pollution is associated with increased mortality and a range of serious health effects, including aggravation of lung disease, asthma attacks, and heart problems.

EPA and DNR information indicate that levels of fine particle pollution have been decreasing in Dane County and throughout Wisconsin, but local officials assert that our likely clean air status cannot be taken for granted.

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“Dane County Clean Air Coalition partners have taken substantial steps over the past five years improving the quality of air we breathe in Dane County, but there is more work to be done,” said Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk. “Our proactive, preventative effort is important for our health, our environment and our economy.”

“Madison and Dane County are doing more than ever to combat air pollution, and air quality is improving as a result. Nevertheless in light of more stringent public health standards, we must work even harder to ensure that we are doing everything possible to protect the health of all our citizens,” said Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz.

The CAC announced earlier this month that the *Clean Air Action Day* program has become a year-round air quality awareness campaign. A *Clean Air Action Day* will be called for the first time in Dane County this winter when air quality data and weather conditions indicate that fine particle pollution is predicted to reach a high level. A *Clean Air Action Day* lets people know that fine particles could reach an unhealthy level for sensitive groups – children, older adults, people with asthma and adults engaged in vigorous outdoor activities.

During a *Clean Air Action Day*, all businesses, government agencies and citizens will be asked to do their share for cleaner air by engaging in fine particle reducing activities. These activities include:

- Reduce vehicle travel by carpooling, taking the bus, delaying trips, or biking or walking. If you need to use your car please reduce speed and limit idling.
- Conserve energy - Reduce energy consumption by turning off electrical devices when not in use and turn down the thermostat.
- Open burning and use of burn barrels should be delayed. Avoid use of wood burning boilers and fireplaces. If you do burn wood, build, small hot fires with dry seasoned wood.

More information on how businesses and citizens can help reduce fine particle pollution can be found at [www.healthyairedane.org](http://www.healthyairedane.org).

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