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EPA Confirms Dane County's Clean Air Status for Fine Particle Pollution

EPA Has Removed Dane County from its Final List Designating Non-Attainment Areas for Fine Particle Pollution but Healthy Air Efforts Must Continue

The Dane County Clean Air Coalition (CAC) received final confirmation recently from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that Dane County has been removed from the agency's list designating counties as "non-attainment" for fine particle pollution. In December 2008, Dane County was one of 211 counties nationwide that was initially designated a "non-attainment" area based on preliminary air monitoring data from 2005-2007. However, final air monitoring data for 2008 resulted in Dane County achieving the new, more stringent federal standard for fine particle pollution. The EPA's announcement of its final non-attainment designation list on October 8th makes Dane County's attainment status official. According to the announcement, Wisconsin currently has three counties –Milwaukee, Racine and Waukesha – that are not meeting federal public health standards for fine particle pollution.

"We are pleased to report that Dane County has officially passed EPA's air quality test for fine particle pollution," Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk said. "Dane County Clean Air Coalition partners have taken a number of strong steps improving the quality of the air we breathe. But we also recognize that we can't breathe easily just yet since the EPA may soon be tightening current air quality standards. We need to continue to step up our efforts to protect the air we breathe and the health of our residents."

"The City of Madison and Dane County are doing more than ever to combat air pollution through our various energy conservation and transportation efforts, and air quality has been improving as a result. However, our growing population combined with increasingly more stringent public health standards requires us to work even harder to make sure that we continue to maintain clean air and protect the health of all our citizens," said Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz.

Dane County's Clean Air Coalition project coordinator, Lisa MacKinnon, pointed to a number of CAC member efforts that have contributed to reduced fine particle emissions including:

- Educating employees and industry colleagues about actions they can take to reduce emissions year-round, such as driving less and conserving energy at home and work, and taking extra actions on Clean Air Action Days
- Initiating a *Healthy Air Employers Network* that assists Dane County employers in reducing their emissions – See www.healthyairdane.org
- Workplace policies to promote smart commuting options such as vanpooling, carpooling, transit use, bicycling and walking that reduce single occupancy vehicle travel through the Rideshare program
- Upgrades and retrofits to equipment such as boilers, generators and diesel school buses for cleaner, less polluting emissions
- Commitments by CAC members MGE, DOA and UW Madison to eliminate coal fuel at their respective power plants over the next two years should also significantly decrease polluted air emissions.

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Despite the EPA's Announcement We Can't Take Clean Air for Granted Since the establishment in 2006 of a stricter federal health-based standard for fine particle pollution, Dane County has come closer to the threshold for being declared a "non-attainment area" for fine particle air pollution. Fine particles are very small particles with diameters less than 2.5 microns (the diameter of a human hair is about 30 times larger). Major contributors to fine particle pollution include trucks, passenger cars, off-road equipment, electric power generation, open burning and agricultural sources.

So far in 2009, there have been six days where a *Clean Air Action Day* alert was issued in Dane County for fine particle pollution. *Clean Air Action Days* are called when the state Department of Natural Resources forecasts fine particle pollution levels could potentially exceed the federal health standard.

What You Can Do to Reduce Fine Particle Pollution

- Carpool, ride Metro Transit bus, walk or bike to work or recreational activities.
- Combine errands and reduce trips.
- Don't let engines idle -- It gets 0 MPG!
- Conserve energy at home and work by turning off unnecessary lighting, computers and other electrical devices when not in use.
- Open burning and use of burn barrels should be reduced. Avoid use of outdoor wood burning boilers and fireplaces.
- If you use a wood burning stove, make sure it is an efficient model; burn dry wood.

One-half of Dane County's air pollutants come from our cars and trucks, as well as other gasoline and diesel engines that power everything from construction equipment to snow blowers. Due to their small size, fine particles are easily inhaled and are deeply deposited into the lungs, which can aggravate and even cause serious health problems such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, heart attack and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

The EPA is slated to revisit the current standard for an update by 2011.

Designation as a non-attainment area can be costly for a county, its businesses and residents. For areas designated as violating the fine particle air quality standard, the states must develop and implement plans to bring the areas into attainment, and new industry seeking to build plants in the areas must meet tight emission control requirements.

Now is the Time to Take Action

While fine particle pollution can occur year-round (the CAC called its most recent *Clean Air Action Day* alert for fine particle pollution on September 4th), activities such as wood burning, vehicle idling and energy use for heating and lighting that occur in the winter months tend to increase possibilities for higher fine particle levels in the air. The Dane County Clean Air Coalition encourages residents and employers do their share to maintain our healthy air by taking actions to reduce fine particle pollution. For more emission reduction ideas for employers and residents, visit www.healthyairedane.org.

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