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Sierra Club Statement On EPA's Pruitt Delaying Cleaning Up Smog in Texas

AUSTIN, Texas - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt announced a plan Tuesday to delay implementing the 2015 ozone standard one year, from 2017 to 2018. EPA's decision will impact several million people, especially children, living in San Antonio and El Paso, since they are on track to be designated by EPA in ozone nonattainment due to unhealthy air quality.

Nonattainment status by EPA requires cities to devise plans to cleanup the polluted air to safer smog levels. San Antonio and El Paso already have high enough ozone this spring to average in nonattainment 2015-17.

EPA's action will not affect the two largest cities in Texas, however. The Houston-Galveston-Brazoria (eight county smog region) and Dallas-Fort Worth (10 county smog region) areas are already nonattainment for the older ozone NAAQS. Both have long-term high ozone problems stretching over decades and have been formally designed by EPA in nonattainment for previous ozone standards.

However, the Dallas-Fort Worth nonattainment area was scheduled to increase from 10 counties to 11 counties by adding Hood County and that will be delayed.

The 2017 Texas smog season has started and high ozone levels above EPA's 70-parts per billion 8-hour standard were observed at monitors in Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, San Antonio, El Paso, Austin, Beaumont, Waco, Temple, and Killeen. To date, these ten Texas urban areas have had 77 ozone exceedances over 16 days at more than 40 monitors. The Houston area has had the most exceedances with 47, the Dallas-Fort Worth area has 16 exceedances, and a few in San Antonio, Austin, El Paso, Beaumont, Waco, Temple, and Killeen.

In response, Dr. Neil Carman, Clean Air Program Director at Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter, issued the following statement:

"EPA's decision reminds us that Texas has four large urban areas with serious smog problems affecting the health of millions of people who deserve better leadership than Scott Pruitt. These areas need new ozone nonattainment designations in order to pursue cleaner air. Children in San Antonio and El Paso will continue to suffer breathing difficulties when they are playing outside on bad air days from high ozone during the hot summer days because of this decision."

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