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New EPA Designation Step In Right Direction To Address Unsafe Smog Pollution In San Antonio

Sierra Club recognizes EPA decision to designate Bexar County as in non-attainment with federal air quality standards, notes agency should have designated all eight counties in area as in non-attainment

SAN ANTONIO

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Yesterday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took a much-delayed and necessary step towards protecting San Antonians from dangerous ozone (smog) pollution by designating Bexar County as being in nonattainment with the 2015 smog standard for ozone of 70 parts per billion (ppb), the strongest federal standard for smog pollution put in place to protect public health.

In San Antonio, smog pollution is formed when pollutants from different sources like power plants, cars, and cement kilns react with sunlight and other chemicals in the atmosphere to produce ozone. Long-term exposure to smog pollution is linked to chronic respiratory diseases like asthma attacks, reproductive and developmental harm, and even premature death. High levels of smog pollution disproportionately impact our most vulnerable populations, which includes children, the elderly, and those who spend time outside for long periods of time.

San Antonio is the last metro area in the entire country to receive a decision from the EPA about whether or not it meets the federal health standards for ozone. Designating Bexar County with a nonattainment status will have a real public health benefit by requiring deliberate state and local planning to lower local smog pollution, but real progress would have meant declaring all eight counties in the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) in non-attainment.

In response to the nonattainment designation for Bexar County, Sierra Club's Alamo Area Group Chair Terry Burns, MD issued the following statement:

“We appreciate EPA’s recognition that the air quality in San Antonio isn’t safe and doesn’t meet federal public health standards. Still, air pollution doesn’t stop at the county line. EPA should do what they have done in Houston and Dallas and declare the entire eight-county MSA area in non-attainment. We’ve been frustrated with the delays so far, and the weak and inadequate voluntary local efforts taken so far. We are looking forward to working on real solutions that will bring relief to our residents negatively impacted by dirty air, and this is a first step.”

Adelita G. Cantu, PhD, RN, nurse with the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, issued the following statement:

“As a public health nurse, I know firsthand the fear and trauma associated with asthma and other severe respiratory illnesses for sick children and their parents. The feeling of helplessness that a parent feels when they see their child not being able to catch their breath, the horrible coughing. The experience is real and too common. Nurses serve in emergency rooms, schools, and community health centers and are on the frontlines of managing chronic asthma each and every day. We know this is a public health issue.

One thing that San Antonio can do to address it is to support the most protective federal standard for ozone pollution to limit how much ozone we’re all exposed to. EPA officials made the right decision for our community by designating San Antonio as nonattainment.”

