



EPA Must Protect Public Health by Passing Strongest Possible Soot Standards

By strengthening the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for soot, EPA can save thousands of lives.

The current standards for the deadly and dangerous particulate matter pollution, or soot, set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are outdated and insufficient. It's time for President Biden's EPA—led by Administrator Michael Regan—to update these pollution limits to the strongest science-based standards, to ensure cleaner air for families, advance environmental justice, and protect public health.

Soot pollution is a threat to public health

What is soot?

- Particulate matter (PM 2.5), also known as soot, is an extremely dangerous pollutant made of a deadly mix of metals, organic chemicals, and acidic substances. These particles are so tiny that they bypass our natural ability to expel larger particles with a cough or sneeze and can be inhaled deeply into the lungs and enter the bloodstream.

Where does soot come from?

- Soot comes from many sources, including coal-fired power plants, vehicle exhaust, and other industrial processes.
- As is often the case, the health burdens of soot are **disproportionately borne by communities of color** living near heavily polluting facilities and high-traffic roadways.

How does soot harm public health?

- Soot exposure causes increased infant mortality, cardiovascular disease, asthma, diabetes, cognitive impairments, and premature death. Additionally, **new studies have shown** that even low levels of air pollution exposure, including to soot, lead to increased risks of Covid-19 infection.
- Heatwaves also exacerbate the impact of soot pollution, **as new research shows** the risk of death increases up to 21% on days with both extreme heat and air pollution.

EPA must act to address dangerous soot pollution

The previous Administration failed to protect public health from dangerous soot pollution.

- The Trump Administration chose to leave an outdated soot standard in place, putting millions of Americans at risk of exposure to harmful air pollution.
- The [“State of the Air” report](#) also found that under the existing soot standards, over 63 million Americans experience unhealthy spikes in daily particle pollution, and more than 20 million Americans experience dangerous levels of soot on a year-round basis.

As a public health agency, EPA has the authority and the obligation to address harmful air pollutants like soot.

- The Clean Air Act [requires EPA](#) to determine National Ambient Air Quality Standards for a series of common outdoor air pollutants known to be harmful to public health and the environment, like soot, ozone, lead, and carbon monoxide.
- Because existing scientific and technical information indicates the standard—which was last updated in 2012—may not be adequate to protect public health, EPA is reconsidering the standard. EPA’s own Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) [even agrees the soot standard must be strengthened.](#)

Now, President Biden’s EPA must protect our right to breathe clean air by passing the strictest possible particulate matter standards.

- EPA must set the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for fine particulate matter pollution no higher than 8 micrograms per cubic meter (mcg/m³) for the annual standard and no higher than 25 mcg/m³ for the 24-hour standard.



- [Research shows](#) that an annual standard of 8 mcg/m³ could avoid 19,000 premature deaths annually and prevent 46,000 emergency department visits for pediatric asthma.
- By setting tighter limits on harmful soot pollution, EPA and President Biden can protect millions of Americans, including vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and people with asthma and other respiratory and heart conditions.

Take action by [submitting a public comment to EPA now!](#)



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