

7.6.3: National Ambient Air Quality Standards

Learning Objectives

- Know the EPA standards for criteria air pollutants.

The Clean Air Act, which was last amended in 1990, requires EPA to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (40 CFR part 50) for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. The Clean Air Act identifies two types of national ambient air quality standards. **Primary standards** provide public health protection, including protecting the health of "sensitive" populations such as asthmatics, children, and the elderly. **Secondary standards** provide public welfare protection, including protection against decreased visibility and damage to animals, crops, vegetation, and buildings.

The EPA has set National Ambient Air Quality Standards for six principal pollutants, which are called "criteria" air pollutants. Periodically, the standards are reviewed and may be revised. The current standards are listed in Table 7.6.3.1. Units of measure for the standards are parts per million (ppm) by volume, parts per billion (ppb) by volume, and micrograms per cubic meter of air ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$).

Table 7.6.3.1 National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Criteria Air Pollutants.

Pollutant [links to historical tables of NAAQS reviews]	Primary/ Secondary	Averaging Time	Level	Form
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	primary	8 hours	9 ppm	Not to be exceeded more than once per year
		1 hour	35 ppm	
Lead (Pb)	primary and secondary	Rolling 3 month average	$0.15 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ⁽¹⁾	Not to be exceeded
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)	primary	1 hour	100 ppb	98th percentile of 1-hour daily maximum concentrations, averaged over 3 years
	primary and secondary	1 year	53 ppb ⁽²⁾	Annual Mean
Ozone (O₃)	primary and secondary	8 hours	0.070 ppm ⁽³⁾	Annual fourth-highest daily maximum 8-hour concentration, averaged over 3 years
Particle Pollution (PM)	primary	1 year	$12.0 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	annual mean, averaged over 3 years
	secondary	1 year	$15.0 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	annual mean, averaged over 3 years
	primary and secondary	24 hours	$35 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	98th percentile, averaged over 3 years

Pollutant [links to historical tables of NAAQS reviews]		Primary/ Secondary	Averaging Time	Level	Form
	PM ₁₀	primary and secondary	24 hours	150 µg/m ³	Not to be exceeded more than once per year on average over 3 years
Sulfur Dioxide (SO ₂)		primary	1 hour	75 ppb ⁽⁴⁾	99th percentile of 1-hour daily maximum concentrations, averaged over 3 years
		secondary	3 hours	0.5 ppm	Not to be exceeded more than once per year

(1) In areas designated nonattainment for the Pb standards prior to the promulgation of the current (2008) standards, and for which implementation plans to attain or maintain the current (2008) standards have not been submitted and approved, the previous standards (1.5 µg/m³ as a calendar quarter average) also remain in effect.

(2) The level of the annual NO₂ standard is 0.053 ppm. It is shown here in terms of ppb for the purposes of clearer comparison to the 1-hour standard level.

(3) Final rule signed October 1, 2015, and effective December 28, 2015. The previous (2008) O₃ standards additionally remain in effect in some areas. Revocation of the previous (2008) O₃ standards and transitioning to the current (2015) standards will be addressed in the implementation rule for the current standards.

(4) The previous SO₂ standards (0.14 ppm 24-hour and 0.03 ppm annual) will additionally remain in effect in certain areas: (1) any area for which it is not yet 1 year since the effective date of designation under the current (2010) standards, and (2) any area for which an implementation plan providing for attainment of the current (2010) standard has not been submitted and approved and which is designated nonattainment under the previous SO₂ standards or is not meeting the requirements of a SIP call under the previous SO₂ standards (40 CFR 50.4(3)). A SIP call is an EPA action requiring a state to resubmit all or part of its State Implementation Plan to demonstrate attainment of the required NAAQS.

Air Quality by Location

You can get live air quality data by location at [airnow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov). Here is the link: <https://www.airnow.gov>

Paying the Price

Pollution has a cost. Manufacturing activities that cause air pollution impose health and clean-up costs on the whole of society, whereas the neighbors of an individual who chooses to fire-proof his home may benefit from a reduced risk of a fire spreading to their own homes. A manufacturing activity that causes air pollution is an example of a negative externality in production. A negative externality in production occurs “when a firm’s production reduces the well-being of others who are not compensated by the firm.” For example, if a laundry firm exists near a polluting steel manufacturing firm, there will be increased costs for the laundry firm because of the dirt and smoke produced by the steel manufacturing firm. If external costs exist, such as those created by pollution, the manufacturer will choose to produce more of the product than would be produced if the manufacturer were required to pay all associated environmental costs. Because responsibility or consequence for self-directed action lies partly outside the self, an element of externalization is involved. If there are external benefits, such as in public safety, less of the good may be produced than would be the case if the producer were to receive payment for the external benefits to others. However, goods and services that involve negative externalities in production, such as those that produce pollution, tend to be over-produced and underpriced since the externality is not being priced into the market.

Pollution can also create costs for the firms producing the pollution. Sometimes firms choose, or are forced by regulation, to reduce the amount of pollution that they are producing. The associated costs of doing this are called abatement costs, or marginal abatement costs if measured by each additional unit. In 2005 pollution abatement capital expenditures and operating costs in the US amounted to nearly \$27 billion.

Summary

- The EPA has set National Ambient Air Quality Standards for six principal pollutants, which are called "criteria" air pollutants.
- The six criteria pollutants are carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.
- The key air pollutants can cause various environmental and health problems that could affect the respiratory, nervous, and cardiovascular systems.

Contributors and Attributions

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