

What is nonattainment?

To protect our health and the quality of the air we breathe, the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set limits on the amounts of certain pollutants that can safely be in our air. These limits are called the National Ambient Air Quality Standards or NAAQS.

EPA considers any geographic area that meets or has pollutant levels below the NAAQS an attainment area. Under ideal circumstances, all of South Carolina would be classified as "attainment." An area with persistent higher pollutant levels is designated a nonattainment area. This means that the area has violated federal health-based standards for outdoor air pollution. Nearby areas that are meeting the standards but contribute to their neighbor's nonattainment can be included into the area designated nonattainment.

Each nonattainment area is declared for a specific pollutant. This means that the same area could be "attainment" for one pollutant, but "nonattainment" for a different pollutant. Nonattainment areas for different pollutants may overlap each other or share common boundaries.

Pollutants of concern in South Carolina

EPA sets standards for six pollutants called "criteria pollutants." Two of these currently could trigger nonattainment status in South Carolina.

Ground-level Ozone. This gas is created through a chemical reaction in the presence of heat and strong sunlight, so is mainly an issue on hot summer days.

Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}). These very small particles of dust, soot, and chemicals are a concern are mainly caused by combustion from sources such as vehicle engines and wood burning.

For more information:

South Carolina Department of Health
and Environmental Control
Bureau of Air Quality
2600 Bull Street
Columbia, SC 29201
(803) 898-4123

Websites of interest:

Bureau of Air Quality:

www.scdhec.gov/baq

South Carolina ozone information:

www.scdhec.gov/ozone

You Hold the Key SC:

www.scdhec.gov/youholdthekeysc

Take a Break From the Exhaust:

www.scdhec.gov/takeabreak

EnviroFlash:

www.enviroflash.info

EPA's ozone website:

www.epa.gov/ozone



South Carolina Department of Health
and Environmental Control

www.scdhec.gov

*We promote and protect the health of the public
and the environment.*

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SPARE THE AIR
south carolina

Breathe in...
breathe out...

breathe in...
breathe out...

This is something we do thousands of times each day, every day. Without air, we cannot live.

What happens when the air we breathe is polluted?

While the rhythm of breathing continues, our health is jeopardized by potentially hazardous pollutants.

What does nonattainment mean to me, as a South Carolina citizen?

If you live in a nonattainment area, the air where you live may be considered unhealthy, at least some of the time. While this does not mean you need to panic or move away, it is a good idea to pay close attention to local air quality and to actions you take that can affect it.

Watch for air quality alerts, especially if you or a family member suffers from a heart or breathing-related disease, such as asthma or chronic bronchitis. Log on to DHEC's Daily Ground Level Ozone webpage (www.scdhec.gov/ozone) to stay up-to-date about air quality in your area. You can also have the daily air quality forecast or sent to your e-mail inbox or cell phone by signing up for Enviroflash at www.enviroflash.info. Individuals who are especially sensitive to air pollution, such as the young, the elderly and those with pre-existing heart or breathing conditions, might need to limit time outdoors when air quality is poor. Keep in mind that air quality can be an issue even in attainment areas, so pay close attention to air quality forecasts no matter where you live.

What does nonattainment mean to government and business?

Compliance with air quality standards contributes to economic growth. Nonattainment status might limit growth of existing industries and could keep new industries from locating in a nonattainment area. This can result in fewer job opportunities.

Failure to act on nonattainment status, such as failure to develop or follow an improvement plan, could result in a potential loss of federal highway funding. It is costly and time-consuming to develop and implement plans to regain attainment status. DHEC strives to avoid having areas of South Carolina designated nonattainment by taking proactive measures to protect air quality. Citizens can do many things to help. For examples, visit **You Hold the Key SC** at www.scdhec.gov/youholdthekeysc.

How does an area get back into attainment?

If an area is designated nonattainment, it is important to return it to attainment as quickly as possible. DHEC, other government agencies, businesses, and the public must work together to make this happen.

Once an area has been classified nonattainment, DHEC has up to three years to submit a plan to EPA that outlines how the area will again meet the standard.

When pollution reductions have been reached, DHEC will ask EPA to redesignate the area as an attainment area.

To do this, DHEC must have:

- Developed a nonattainment plan and had it approved by EPA.
- Demonstrated that air quality now meets the standard that had been violated.
- Demonstrated proof of real pollution reductions. That is, improvements cannot be caused by factors such as unusually favorable weather conditions.
- Developed and requested EPA approval of a plan that outlines how the air will stay healthy for 20 years.

How can I make a difference?

Air quality affects us all, so it is in everyone's best interest to take an active role in protecting it. Small actions by many add up to a big difference.

- Drive less. Ride the bus, carpool, walk, bike, combine errands, or van-pool when possible.
- Turn off your vehicle when you are sitting idle, such as when waiting in a drive-through.
- Maintain your car and keep your tires properly inflated.
- Don't top off the gas tank. Topping off allows harmful chemicals to escape into the air.
- Avoid using gasoline-powered hand tools and lawnmowers, especially on hot days.
- Reduce burning. Burning releases many types of pollutants into the air.
- Convert from wood to gas or electric heat, or get a clean-burning fireplace insert or wood stove.
- Comply with air quality advisories and burn bans.
- Encourage your local municipality to enact ordinances that protect air quality.