



South Coast Air Quality Management District

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****PRESS RELEASE****

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South Coast Air Quality Management District to request re-classification for ozone in Coachella Valley

Action would extend attainment deadline to 2024

DIAMOND BAR – The South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD) today announced plans to seek a voluntary re-classification from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) for the 1997 8-hour federal standard for ozone in the Coachella Valley. If granted, the area will be reclassified to “extreme” status and will allow South Coast AQMD up to five additional years to reach attainment.

“We constantly face challenges such as hotter summer weather and the threat of climate change in the region,” said South Coast AQMD’s Executive Officer Wayne Nastri. “Although we need more time to bring the Coachella Valley into attainment, we are confident that projected emission reductions coupled with our strict regulations will allow us to combat ozone levels and meet federal standards under this new deadline.”

Coachella Valley is currently classified as “severe-15” nonattainment for ground-level ozone and is facing a deadline of June 2019 to meet the federal air quality standard of 0.08 parts per million (ppm). Coachella Valley is unique in its geography in that it is located downwind from the South Coast Air Basin. As such, when high levels of ozone are formed in the South Coast Air Basin, it is transported to the Coachella Valley. Similarly, when ozone precursors such as nitrogen oxides (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are emitted from mobile sources and stationary sources located in the South Coast Air Basin, they are also transported to the Coachella Valley. As a result, ozone levels in the Coachella Valley are primarily due to emissions in the South Coast Air Basin.

The Coachella Valley has attained federal standards for one-hour ozone, particulate matter 2.5, nitrogen oxides, lead, and sulfur dioxide. Due to South Coast AQMD’s stationary and mobile source emission reduction programs both in the South Coast Air Basin and in Coachella Valley, ground level ozone in the valley has decreased from 0.108 ppm in 2003 to 0.87 ppm in 2016.

In the past two years, unusual weather patterns that favor the formation of ozone such as higher temperatures and an increase of stagnant weather conditions have resulted in higher levels of ozone statewide and across the western United States. Because of that, Coachella Valley saw an increase in ozone levels in 2017 and 2018.

Based on these recent measurements, Coachella Valley will not be able to meet the 2019 deadline and the South Coast AQMD plans to seek a re-classification that will extend the attainment deadline to June 2024. The new “extreme” classification, if approved by U.S. EPA, would result in stricter emissions thresholds for major stationary sources in the area lowering from 25 tons per year to 10 tons per year for NOx and VOCs, which could also result in more stringent permitting requirements. In addition, the agency will be required to revise its State Implementation Plan that will serve as a roadmap towards meeting the federal standard.

South Coast AQMD continues to reduce ozone and improve air quality in the Coachella Valley and has provided more than \$50 million in grant funding towards paving dirt roads and parking lots, clean energy projects and cleaner vehicles. In addition, the agency continues to enforce the Fugitive Dust Rule through compliance and training programs that ensures facilities are using best available control measures for dust mitigation.

As unusual hotter temperatures and wildfires continue, the agency is planning on conducting a study to evaluate the meteorological trends contributing to higher ozone levels in the basin. The results are expected to highlight uncertainties associated with climate change and how it affects air quality.

Exposure to ground-level ozone can cause shortness of breath, aggravate lung diseases and can cause chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. These effects have been found even in healthy people, but can be more serious in people with lung diseases such as asthma.

South Coast AQMD staff will be presenting this proposed plan to the Governing Board for approval in June.

South Coast AQMD is the air pollution control agency for Orange County and major portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. For more tips on what you can do to improve air quality, visit www.aqmd.gov or, watch our [Do One Thing Video](#).

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