

## COMPASS Member Agency Overview:

# Public Comment on Proposed Changes to the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for Ground Level Ozone



**COMPASS**  
COMMUNITY PLANNING ASSOCIATION  
of Southwest Idaho

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed changes to the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ground-level ozone. These changes are open for public comment through March 17, 2015. The information below provides a general overview of the proposed changes and the commenting process.

### **What is ground-level ozone?**

**Ozone is an odorless, colorless gas** that forms in the atmosphere when three atoms of oxygen are combined. While natural, and necessary in the stratosphere, ozone at ground level is not natural and is a health hazard and considered an air pollutant. Ozone is not emitted directly into the air, but is created by chemical reactions primarily between nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of strong sunlight. Pollutants that cause ozone come from motor vehicle exhaust, industrial emissions, gasoline vapors, chemical solvents, and other sources. Learn more about ground-level ozone, and steps you can take to prevent it, here: [www.deq.idaho.gov/air-quality/air-pollutants/criteria-pollutants/ozone.aspx](http://www.deq.idaho.gov/air-quality/air-pollutants/criteria-pollutants/ozone.aspx).

### **What is an "air quality standard"?**

Air quality standards are levels of air pollution that the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers to be the **dividing line between healthy and unhealthy**. Areas must maintain air pollution levels below the standards; if they do not, the areas are designated as "nonattainment" areas and must devise a plan to lower pollutant levels to re-attain the standard.

### **What is the current ground-level ozone standard?**

The current standard is **75 parts per billion (ppb)**. That number is compared to a three-year rolling average of the 4th highest ozone value measured in each year. That average must be at or below 75 ppb to attain the standard.

### **What is the proposed standard?**

EPA is proposing to set the new standard **somewhere between 65 and 70 ppb**. Note that while EPA is asking for comments on the range between 65 and 70 ppb, the **new standard will be one specific number**; NOT a range.

### **How will this affect the Treasure Valley?**

**That is unknown, as it will depend on where the standard is set and future ozone levels.** For the most recent three-year period of 2012, 2013, and 2014\*, the three-year rolling average was 69 ppb; therefore, lower than the upper end of the proposed range (70), but higher than the lower end of the proposed range (65). However, as proposed, the new standard would first be compared to an average of 2014, 2015, and 2016 ozone levels, so we won't know until the end of 2016 what the three-year average will be. (\*2014 data are not yet official)

### **Why is EPA proposing the change?**

The **Clean Air Act requires EPA to review the standards every five years**. EPA last updated these standards in 2008, setting them at 75 ppb. EPA is proposing to lower the standard to between 65 and 70 ppb to better protect human health.

### **Should I submit comments on the proposed changes?**

**That is entirely up to you.** COMPASS is not suggesting you submit, or not submit, comments.

### **How do I submit comments?**

Submit your comments, identified by Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2008-0699, to the EPA by **one of the following methods**:

Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Email: [A-and-R-Docket@epa.gov](mailto:A-and-R-Docket@epa.gov).

Fax: (202) 566-9744.

Mail: EPA, EPA Docket Center (EPA/DC), mailcode 28221T, Attention Docket ID No. OAR-2008-0699, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20460. Include two copies.

### **What is the deadline for commenting?**

**March 17, 2015**

### **Where can I find more information?**

[www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-17/pdf/2014-28674.pdf](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-17/pdf/2014-28674.pdf)

EPA will also be holding **three public hearings** (two on January 29 and one on February 2, 2015). See [www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-31/html/2014-30688.htm](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-31/html/2014-30688.htm) more for information.

### **When will the new standard be issued?**

**October 1, 2015**

### **When will the new standard go into effect?**

As proposed, the **new standard will be compared to data from 2014, 2015, and 2016**. After 2016 data have been collected, the State of Idaho must determine whether or not it is in compliance with the new standard, and submit its determination to the EPA. The EPA will have one year to make an official attainment/nonattainment designation.

### **What happens if the area does not meet the standard ("goes nonattainment")?**

The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) must develop an air quality plan that outlines the steps that will be taken to meet the standard. Once the area has re-attained the standard, it will be redesignated as a "maintenance area" and must continue to follow its air quality plan for 20 more years. The plan will contain pollution "budgets." When COMPASS updates Communities in Motion and/or the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), we must conduct modeling to ensure that transportation projects in those plans do not cause the area to exceed the pollution budgets. This process is called an "air quality conformity demonstration."

### **What area would be affected?**

The exact boundaries of a potential nonattainment area are **unknown at this time**; however, it is likely that both Ada and Canyon Counties would be included if the Treasure Valley were deemed a nonattainment area for ozone. Some portions of surrounding counties could be included as well.