



**1107 Ninth Street, Suite 801  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 441-5700 (916) 441-5708 FAX  
[www.capcoa.org](http://www.capcoa.org)**

**PRESIDENT**

Erik C. White  
*Placer County APCD*

**VICE PRESIDENT**

Samir Sheikh  
*San Joaquin Valley APCD*

**SECRETARY/CHIEF  
FINANCIAL OFFICER**

Joseph Tona  
*Tehama County APCD*

**PAST PRESIDENT**

Aeron Arlin Genet  
*Santa Barbara County APCD*

**DIRECTORS**

Alberto Ayala, PhD  
*Sacramento Metro AQMD*

Brad Poiriez  
*Mojave Desert AQMD*

Doug Gearhart  
*Lake County APCD*

Paula Forbis  
*San Diego County APCD*

Philip Fine, PhD  
*Bay Area AQMD*

Richard Stedman  
*Monterey Bay ARD*

Robert Bamford  
*Northern Sonoma County APCD*

Stephen Ertle  
*Butte County AQMD*

Wayne Natri  
*South Coast AQMD*

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Tung T. Le  
[tung@capcoa.org](mailto:tung@capcoa.org)

March 28, 2023

The Honorable Michael S. Regan  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington DC 20460

RE: U.S. EPA Reconsideration of PM2.5 NAAQS Standard – Docket ID No.  
EPA-HQ-OAR-2015-0072

Dear Administrator Regan:

The California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA) is pleased to provide comments on U.S. EPA's proposed rule on "Reconsideration of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Particulate Matter," published in the Federal Register on January 27, 2023 (88 Fed. Reg. 5558). CAPCOA represents the air pollution control officers from all 35 air districts in California. The air districts partner closely with the California Air Resources Board and U.S. EPA as co-regulators to ensure healthy air quality by developing and implementing plans to meet state and national standards.

As the most populous state in the nation and the world's fifth largest economy, California is home to over 39 million people. Through our ports, railways, and roads we serve as a main conduit for the United States' trade with the world. Additionally, our in-state agricultural, manufacturing, and industrial facilities provide for much of the nation's needs. Unfortunately, with this dense population and related infrastructure to support high levels of productivity come significant air quality challenges. Our residents breathe some of the most polluted air in the nation. The only two Extreme non-attainment areas in the country – namely the San Joaquin Valley and South Coast air basins are both in California. Despite decades of progress, we continue to fail to meet multiple federal air quality standards including the PM standards. According to state data, due to PM2.5 emissions alone, California's residents face 7,200 premature deaths a year, along with 5,200 excess emergency room visits and nearly 2,000 excess hospital admissions.

Recognizing these adverse health outcomes, CAPCOA strongly supports scientifically based recommendations for establishing the PM standard. Any decision should be guided by a complete and thorough review of the latest available science by qualified experts from a wide array of disciplines and perspectives. We believe this approach is critical in U.S. EPA's work to protect public health, including revising the PM NAAQS.

Given the substantial challenges we and other states will face in achieving a lower PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard, it is also critical that U.S. EPA partner with state and local agencies to assist in meeting new standards.

First, we ask that U.S. EPA develop and issue implementation rules concurrently with the issuance of any final revised NAAQS, including the PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS currently being reconsidered. Doing so will greatly assist states in their ability to develop SIPs in a timely manner which expedites implementation of public health protections that new NAAQS are designed to put in place. Implementation rules have often lagged behind finalized NAAQS by years, resulting in substantial delays before we can begin realizing the benefits of those public health protections. We ask that as U.S. EPA makes progress towards promulgating the new PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS that it simultaneously establishes a process to work closely with states and air agencies to develop implementation rules and guidance.

Second, U.S. EPA must ensure implementation rules provide maximum flexibility and support to state and local agencies. Echoing the testimony of many including CAPCOA's member air districts, PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution, in addition to directly emitted PM, is often driven by photochemical reactions of its precursors which includes NO<sub>x</sub> emissions. Controlling these precursors is often more complex and costly compared to controlling PM emissions alone. U.S. EPA should ensure that state and local air agencies are able to rely on and account for federal measures that achieve real emission reductions, especially those from the mobile source sector. Mobile source emissions account for 70 – 80% of air pollution emissions in California; a significant portion of PM emissions in the state are from this sector in the form of directly emitted PM or from its precursor NO<sub>x</sub>. Quickly reducing mobile source emissions will be critical in our ability to achieving attainment with the new standard.

Third, and closely related to our ask for U.S. EPA to consider PM precursors, the agency must recognize that despite California's stationary and mobile source programs being amongst the most stringent in the nation, emissions from heavy duty mobile sources under federal regulatory authority, specifically emissions from ships, aircraft, and locomotives, contribute substantially to PM emissions. It will be impossible for us to meet a lower standard without additional emissions reductions from these federally controlled sources. We urge U.S. EPA to commit to assisting California and other states in meeting the revised NAAQS by expeditiously developing strategies to reduce emissions from heavy duty mobile sources.

Fourth, the proposal includes requirements for highly granular monitoring in at-risk communities and it states that additional monitoring design and new deployment approaches will be needed. U.S. EPA should recognize that monitors used to demonstrate NAAQS compliance are not well suited for short term, highly localized measurement of air quality. While CAPCOA strongly believes that federal reference monitors should continue to be operated as rigorously as possible, we ask U.S. EPA to consider air monitoring objectives and resources for at-risk communities and how they may guide roles and guidance for appropriate air measurement

technologies and associated data. Further, CAPCOA asks U.S. EPA to provide states and local agencies maximum flexibility in identifying where to site monitors for at-risk areas. The air districts, in partnership with CARB and other state agencies, have programs underway to identify at-risk communities and to address pollution in them. It is important that any new federal requirements align with and support these existing efforts, and we offer our experience and expertise in this area as U.S. EPA develops implementation guidance. In addition, while U.S. EPA has identified EJSCREEN as a tool to identify at-risk communities, it should also allow states and local agencies the flexibility to use other tools they deem appropriate to identify at-risk communities such as the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's CalEnviroScreen. Finally, state and local air agencies will need more financial resources than we currently have to undertake the administration, planning, permitting, compliance, and monitoring activities necessary to implement a revised NAAQS. New requirements will strain already resource-constrained air agencies. U.S. EPA must assist us in this regard and we request its assistance in procuring adequate funding to enable us to fulfill our responsibilities. Of note, implementation of any additional requirements to expand identification and monitoring of at-risk communities will require additional resources. U.S. EPA must ensure that sufficient funding is provided to state and local agencies to support the existing monitoring network, as well as pair any increase in monitoring requirements with an increase in state and local agency funding through additional section 103/105 funds or other appropriate channels.

Finally, as California and the west continue to experience historic wildfires, we have increasingly relied on prescribed fire as a critical tool in reducing wildfire risk. In 2022, Governor Newsom's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force released a Strategic Plan that sets a target of expanding the use of prescribed fire from the current level of approximately 250,000 acres annually to 400,000 acres annually by 2025, a shared goal between state, federal, tribal, and local entities, which is part of an overall goal to treat 1 million acres annually in California by 2025. Current estimates indicate that between 10 million and 30 million acres of forest and wildland in California would benefit from some form of fuel reduction treatment including but not limited to grinding and chipping, composting, cogeneration, or using biomass as a feedstock to produce biofuel. However, even with this all-of-the-above approach, we anticipate that between 4 and 12 million acres will need to be treated with prescribed fire. Although emissions from prescribed fire are reduced compared to wildfires, these emissions will contribute to our challenges in meeting NAAQS and should the new standard be significantly lower, limit our ability to use this critical tool. We ask that U.S. EPA work closely with us to develop guidance on how to account for prescribed fire emissions in writing and implementing SIPs, and to provide support for states and air districts in need of enhanced forecasting to better plan and allow for prescribed burns during conditions that are optimal for smoke dispersion.

Along with this, U.S. EPA should also provide guidance and resources to its regional offices and to local air agencies for quickly evaluating and approving exceptional events (EE) caused by wildfire. California's significantly worsening wildfire events over the last several years should be taken into consideration as U.S. EPA makes attainment determinations for the new standard. CAPCOA asks that all EE submittals be finalized before these determinations are made, which includes providing assistance to California's rural air districts that may not have sufficient staffing to develop EE submittals. Recognizing that U.S. EPA Region 9 is currently resource-limited, we would suggest considering re-directing staff resources from other regions to assist in quickly evaluating EE submittals from California and other Western states most impacted by wildfires.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on the proposal to revise the PM2.5 NAAQS. CAPCOA and its members look forward to working with U.S. EPA on this important rulemaking, and we offer our support as U.S. EPA moves forward. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss our comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at (530) 745-2330 or Tung T. Le, CAPCOA's Executive Director at (916) 441-5700.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Erik C. White", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Erik C. White  
President