



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Federal Air Quality Standards Attained at All Eight Monitors for First Time Ever

PITTSBURGH – The Allegheny County Health Department today announced that, for the first time in its history, all eight air quality monitors in Allegheny County have met federal air quality standards. This milestone means that the region is now in attainment with carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, ozone and particulate matter (PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀).

“This achievement comes after years of hard work by the Health Department, federal and state agencies and local industry to clean up the air in Allegheny County,” said Health Department Director Dr. Debra Bogen. “But we have more work to do, and the Health Department is committed to ensuring everyone in Allegheny County has clean air to breathe.”

Based on preliminary data from the department’s monitors, Allegheny County is attaining both the annual and 24-hour standards for PM_{2.5} for the first time since the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for fine particulate matter in 1999. This represents a significant step in the county’s efforts to improve air quality for all residents. The data is being certified for submission to the EPA for approval.

The Health Department has eight air quality monitors that record PM_{2.5} readings – in Liberty, Avalon, Lawrenceville, South Fayette, Harrison, Clairton, North Braddock, and along the Parkway East. Air quality recorded at the Liberty monitor, located near U.S. Steel’s Clairton Coke Works, is the only monitor which has kept Allegheny County from attaining the EPA standard in recent years.

The EPA annual standard for PM_{2.5} is 12 micrograms per cubic meters (µg/m³), averaged over 3 years. The 24-hour standard is 35 µg/m³. The data for 2020 from the Liberty monitor shows an annual average of 9.8 µg/m³ and a 24-hour average of 27.2 µg/m³, resulting in 3-year averages of 11.2 and 32, respectively, both below the federal standards required to reach attainment. The 9.8 µg/m³ annual average for 2020 also meets the World Health Organization (WHO) air quality guidelines of 10 µg/m³.

Air quality around Allegheny County improved remarkably in 2020. While there have been decreases in vehicle traffic because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was not a significant decrease in industrial production over that same time period. The county was still on track to attain the federal standards even without lower levels of pollution due to the pandemic.

In 2020, the sulfur dioxide monitor registered a record low of 44 ppb, 31 points below the 75 ppb standard. In 2019, the number was 80 ppb for a two-year value of 62 ppb; again, below the 75 ppb standard. The 2018 value of 130 ppb reflects a time period before SO₂ controls were put in place as part of the state implementation plan; resulting in three-year data being just above the 75 ppb standard.

Pollutant and Duration	2018	2019	2020	3-Year Value	Standard
SO ₂ 1-HR	130 ppb	80 ppb	44 ppb	85 ppb	75 ppb
O ₃ 8-HR	72 ppb	61 ppb	71 ppb	68 ppb	70 ppb

PM _{2.5} Annual*	11.5 µg/m ³	12.2 µg/m ³	9.8 µg/m ³	11.2 µg/m ³	12.0 µg/m ³
PM _{2.5} 24-HR*	28.0 µg/m ³	39.4 µg/m ³	27.2 µg/m ³	32 µg/m ³	35 µg/m ³
PM ₁₀ 24-HR**	57 µg/m ³	105 µg/m ³	46 µg/m ³	70 µg/m ³	150 µg/m ³
NO ₂ 1-HR	36.8 ppb	35.3 ppb	33.5 ppb	35 ppb	100 ppb
CO 1-HR***	7.3 ppb	6.5 ppb	6.0 ppb	6.6 ppb	35 ppb
CO 8-HR***	3.3 ppb	3.8 ppb	3.4 ppb	3.5 ppb	9 ppb

**The PM_{2.5} values are considered preliminary until approved by the EPA.*

***Maximum values for PM₁₀ are shown. To be in attainment, these values may not be exceeded more than once per year on average over three years.*

****Maximum values for CO are shown. To be in attainment, these values may not be exceeded more than once per year.*

“This is exciting news for our county and region as we meet federal air quality standards for the first time ever at all eight of our monitors,” said County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. “Acting as the EPA’s enforcement arm, the Health Department has continued to use its regulatory power to improve air quality. It’s extremely rewarding to see this measure of success. We are grateful for the continued support of our federal and state elected officials including Congressman Doyle, State Senator Jay Costa, State Senator Jim Brewster and State Representative Austin Davis and the work they’ve done to encourage industry to continue improving its pollution controls. We still have much work to do. By continuing to work together, we can ensure that we continue to improve our air and quality of life.”

The Health Department has been making significant strides in improving the air quality in the county for several years. In 2017, the Health Department joined the EPA in a historic Notice of Violation against U.S. Steel’s Edgar Thomson Work to address visible emissions and maintenance violations. At the start of 2018, the department enacted a new civil penalty policy that increased fines to encourage compliance.

The department continues its efforts to address and improve air quality. Currently, coke oven regulations are going through a public comment process and the department is also working on a rule that would require companies to further limit emission during weather-related pollution episodes. Staff have been added to the Air Quality section, with a reorganized Enforcement section providing for improved compliant response and compliance assurance. The department also continues to support non-regulatory measures. As just one example, the department secured a \$5.7 million Targeted Airshed Grant to buy seven electric buses for the Port Authority of Allegheny County as part of its Bus Rapid Transit project.

To learn more about the Health Department’s Air Quality Program, visit <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Programs/Air-Quality/Air-Quality.aspx>.

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