

States call on EPA for tougher air pollution regulations

November 6 2009, By James B. Hale

Twelve states and the District of Columbia urged the Environmental Protection Agency Thursday to adopt more rigorous national policies so they can meet federal air pollution reduction requirements for the region.

The Ozone Transport Commission approved a statement that said states will have trouble meeting air pollution reduction goals on time without tougher national laws. The commission is composed of 12 Northeastern states and the District, and was formed by the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act.

The statement asked that the EPA put harsher rules on pollution sources like industrial boilers, consumer products and asphalt paving. It said the rules would be necessary to meet the air quality requirements set forth by the Clean Air Act.

Cathy Milbourn, senior press officer for the EPA, said the agency is currently hard at work on programs to reduce pollution.

"We will continue to work with the Ozone Transport Commission and our state partners to improve air quality," she said.

The commission sent out a joint letter in September with organizations from Midwestern states that first suggested the EPA reconsider the Clean Air Interstate Rule that calls for air pollutant reductions in 31 states in the eastern half of the country and the District of Columbia.

Commission members said the EPA needs to include every state that contributes significantly to air pollution, not just the Eastern states. With the combined efforts of contributing states, the commission could make more progress, they said.

After the EPA failed to meet their expectations, the commission voted on a stronger, official statement.

Ted Aburn, director of the Maryland Department of the Environment's Air and Radiation Management Administration, said though many states on the commission, like Maryland, have made strides in cleaning the air, meeting EPA requirements is difficult when a lot of the pollution comes from other states.

"On our worst days, up to 70 percent of our problem comes from an upwind area, which we have no control over," Aburn said. "So to continue making progress in Maryland, we not only need to do the right thing within our border, we need to get help from the EPA to ensure things take place in" neighboring states.

Aburn said although Maryland and other commission states have been doing their part in cutting down on [air pollution](#), there are still many road blocks ahead.

"Clearly we're working very hard, but this is a very challenging issue," he said at the meeting.

In an earlier interview, he said the Maryland Department of the Environment has already worked to reduce the amount of pollution from sources like factories and cars. Programs that install devices that filter emissions from smokestacks and other pollution sources have shown real progress in the last decade, he said.

The only problem now is getting everybody else on board.

Gina McCarthy, the EPA's assistant administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation, agreed that in order to make real change, the EPA and the states will need to work together to get the "biggest bang for the buck" in the future.

McCarthy reminded the commission that through all the policy and law, real people are ultimately the victims of poor air quality. It's easy to forget about all the health problems that are an end result of inaction, she said.

"While climate change is a tremendous challenge, we still have an incredible need to look at the public health implications of [air quality](#)," McCarthy said. "While we have made tremendous progress, there are still people dying."

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