

US proposes stricter air quality standards for soot

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The US EPA has proposed stricter air quality standards for microscopic particles.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed stricter standards on Friday for microscopic particles responsible for harmful air

pollution.

The EPA proposal, which will be subject to public comment and hearings before it would take effect, would toughen the national air quality standard for [fine particles](#), also known as soot.

Fine particle pollution can be caused by a number of sources including [construction sites](#), smokestacks, wildfires, [power plants](#) and vehicles.

It causes respiratory illnesses such as asthma, heart attacks and disproportionately affects low-income and communities of color in the United States.

The EPA proposal would strengthen the air quality standard for fine particles from an annual average level of 12 micrograms per cubic meter to between nine and 10 micrograms per cubic meter.

"Our work to deliver clean, breathable air for everyone is a top priority at EPA," agency chief Michael Regan said in a statement.

"This proposal will help ensure that all communities, especially the most vulnerable among us, are protected from exposure to harmful pollution."

The EPA estimated that a strengthened air quality standard would prevent up to 4,200 premature deaths and 270,000 lost workdays per year.

The standards were last changed under the Obama administration in 2012. The Trump administration declined to do so in 2020.

Harold Wimmer, president and CEO of the American Lung Association, expressed disappointment with the EPA proposal, saying that it did not go far enough in regulating fine particle emissions.

"Current science shows that stronger limits are urgently needed," Wimmer said.

"More protective standards are necessary to drive cleanup nationwide in communities that currently experience unhealthy levels of deadly particle pollution."

Beto Lugo Martinez, executive director of Clean Air Now, described the proposal as a "good step" but insufficient.

"Without strategic placing of regulatory monitors that can actually measure excessive pollution levels and the will to make polluters pay for violating the standard, this new 'recommendation' will not make a difference," Martinez said in a statement.

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