What are ozone designations?

- The Clean Air Act requires the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to protect public health against unsafe levels of ground-level ozone, or smog pollution. Under the Act, EPA must set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ozone and five other criteria pollutants.
- In October 2015, in response to an extensive body of studies demonstrating harms to public health, EPA strengthened the standard of 75 parts per billion (ppb), last set in 2008, to 70 ppb.
- A critical first step in initiating clean-up of local air pollution is setting designations, or identifying which parts of the country meet the standard versus which parts of the country are struggling with unsafe levels of smog pollution.
- Under the cooperative federalism approach established by the Clean Air Act, states and EPA first work together to identify these counties and then develop plans to reduce pollution and maintain improved air quality.
- Designations should be science-based, both to ensure responsible sources are identified for clean-up, but also to give local residents accurate information on their local quality so they can take necessary steps to protect themselves and their loved ones on days when the air outside is unsafe.

Why are ozone designations important?

- Only once EPA finalizes these designations – formal identifications of whether every community has healthy air or not – do the Clean Air Act's protections designed to clean up ozone pollution kick in.
- Breathing in ozone pollution is dangerous, and even deadly. It triggers asthma attacks and can make breathing difficult even for healthy adults. It is linked to lung and heart disease, and is responsible for thousands of premature deaths and millions of days of missed work and school each year.
- Since passage of the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments, our country has made tremendous progress improving air quality and reducing deadly ozone, or smog, pollution. Unfortunately, however, these improvements have not been enjoyed equitably and the health burdens of ozone pollution are not evenly distributed. Too many communities remain overburdened with dirty air and are regularly exposed to unsafe levels of ozone pollution.
- Lower-income communities and communities of color bear a disproportionate share of the health harms from air pollution. Seniors, children, outdoor workers and people with pre-existing respiratory ailments are also particularly vulnerable.

What's next?

- States must now begin working on, and will have three years to complete, State Implementation Plans (SIPs) for their nonattainment counties.
- These plans can and should factor in other federal rules that are helping to reduce national air pollution levels. They should ensure any new pollution sources do not make an area's pollution any worse, and that reasonable steps are taken to clean up existing sources.

Common myths dispelled

- *A nonattainment designation is bad for business and will hurt the local economy.* FALSE: History and the facts show us that the Clean Air Act is working and that since enactment our population and economy have grown, all while overall air pollution levels have decreased substantially.
- *Meeting a stronger standard isn't possible because of transport ozone from other countries and/or naturally occurring background ozone.* FALSE: EPA accounted for international transport of ozone and determined that the dominant sources were domestic and caused by human activity. Tools exist for states to receive an exemption from rare, naturally occurring spikes in background ozone that would contribute to an area failing to meet the updated standard.
- *The technology doesn't exist to meet a lower standard.* FALSE: Smog is a manmade problem and there are manmade solutions. The technology to reduce emissions exists, and other federal air rules will bolster state efforts to reduce emissions that cause ozone pollution.