



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on June 15, 2012

## EPA Proposes Stricter New Standards for Soot Pollution

Adding to the Obama administration's mounting heap of regulations, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [proposed](#) Friday new air quality standards to curb the purportedly fatal repercussions of soot emissions. In reducing the emission of such particles, which environmentalists say are one of the most hazardous air pollutants, oil refiners and large manufacturers will be forced to invest in costly pollution-reduction upgrades.



Measuring one-thirteenth the width of a strand of human hair, these fine particles are generally diffused through activities such as wood-burning and vehicle emissions, which can allegedly cause heart and respiratory problems when entering the bloodstream. Environmental groups and other proponents of the regulation — which is set to be finalized by December 14 — say the effort would produce countless benefits for both the economy and general public health.

The regulation would institute a maximum allowable cap for soot emissions in between 12 and 13 micrograms per cubic meter of air. The current annual requirement is 15 micrograms per cubic meter. The revised standards would curb the range of fine-particle emissions by [about 17 percent](#), according to Paul Billings, a vice president of the American Lung Association, who was briefed on the new standard.

"It's going to be a big step forward," asserted Frank O'Donnell, president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch. "This could help frame the national effort to clean this up for at least a decade."

Dr. Albert Rizzo, board chairman of the American Lung Association, said fine-particle pollution can be fatal, and that the EPA's soot rule will save countless lives. "The science is clear, and overwhelming evidence shows that particle pollution at levels currently labeled as officially 'safe' causes heart attacks, strokes and asthma attacks," he [charged](#).

"The American Lung Association is pleased that they have proposed a much tighter particle pollution standard that will prevent thousands of premature deaths and tens of thousands of asthma attacks each year," Billings added. "We will examine the proposal and work through the public comment process to urge the most protective standard."

Perhaps leery of political backlash over the new standards, the Obama administration attempted to postpone a decision on the regulation until after the November elections. But a federal judge, Robert Wilkins of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, demanded that officials act on the issue, after 11 states filed a lawsuit requesting a decision this year.

However, Republicans and industry officials say the rules are far too stringent and could severely hamper economic growth in battleground states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania. Howard Feldman, Director of Regulatory and Scientific Affairs at the American Petroleum Institute (API), warned that the rule will curb economic investment in areas that fail to comply with federal pollution requirements. Feldman [explained](#):

Air quality will continue to improve dramatically under the current government standards, but



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EPA's proposal could substantially increase costs to states, municipalities, businesses and ultimately consumers without justified benefits. We are concerned that it could come at a significant economic cost and lost investments and limit our ability to produce the energy our nation needs.

EPA based its proposal on a faulty scientific analysis: important scientific data have been ignored and other purported findings have been misinterpreted. A more objective review of the science would conclude that the current standards should be considered among the regulatory options to continue improving air quality.

Counties that do not meet the federal standards will be considered out of attainment, Feldman adds, and companies that are considering a location to build a new plant or refinery "could perceive non-attainment as non-investment." Consequently, economies in select areas of the country, especially where oil refining and major manufacturing are prominent, will be hit heavily by the EPA's tougher standards.

Jeffrey Holmstead, who headed the EPA's Air Office under George W. Bush, predicts the rule will produce a flurry of restrictions on the energy and manufacturing sectors. "It may not sound like much, lowering the standard from 15 to 13, but it will mean a lot more regulations in many parts of the country," he warned. "I suspect this action will attract a lot of attention from the Hill."

The EPA under President Obama has been busy, proposing a host of regulations that have had debilitating effects upon the energy industry. Indeed, under this administration, the EPA has inflicted a crippling blow on the coal industry with a slew of new rules on greenhouse-gas emissions, which are not only prompting a precipitous rise in energy prices, but are also causing a mass exodus of energy-related jobs.

In fact, the administration's new draconian environmental regulations on coal have spurred controversy from legislators on both sides of the political aisle, as constituents worry about further job degradation in their respective states. As previously [reported](#) by *The New American*, House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) wrote a letter to the President in March slamming the EPA's reckless environmental rule-making, citing a mercury standard and a myriad of other regulations that would reportedly kill nearly 200,000 jobs per year.

"You have rightly noted that oil production alone cannot solve our energy challenges," [stated](#) Boehner. "That's why we've also been disturbed by regulations proposed by your administration, such as the Utility-MACT rule, that would increase costs and limit the supply of other domestic sources of energy." The House Speaker added, "These rules, the most expensive in EPA history, stand to cost 180,000 American jobs per year and would force the premature retirement of 12 percent of America's coal-fired energy generation."

*Photo: [industrial smoke from chimney on sky](#) via Shutterstock*



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