



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fairbanks, Juneau out of compliance with federal air quality standards;

DEC works to help bring areas into attainment to protect health

December 22, 2008 (Monday) – Juneau, Alaska –Today the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated areas around Fairbanks and Juneau as out of compliance with air quality standards for fine particulate matter, also known as PM 2.5. These designations are expected to take effect in April, 2009, 90 days after they appear in the *Federal Register*.

“We are pleased that EPA worked with the State and local governments to set non-attainment area boundaries based on local information,” said Larry Hartig, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

“The smaller boundaries make more sense than those originally proposed.”

In Fairbanks, the designation includes the cities of Fairbanks and North Pole as well as surrounding areas out to Esther, Fox and Goldstream Valley. In Juneau, the designation is confined to the Mendenhall Valley including the airport area.

Sources of fine particulate matter include power plants, vehicles and wood burning stoves. The tiny particles and droplets—about one-thirtieth of the diameter of human hair--can cause health problems when inhaled. In 2006, the EPA strengthened its air quality standards for fine particulates. “Older adults and children are at higher risk for respiratory-related health effects from these air pollutants. We will continue to work together with the EPA and community officials to bring these areas back in line with air quality standards to ensure the health of Alaskans is protected,” said Alice Edwards, director of DEC’s Division of Air Quality.

Edwards says extensive research and consideration went into the development of boundaries for the affected areas. The EPA designation will require Fairbanks and Juneau to limit emissions of fine particulate matter.

“We know wood burning stoves contribute to poor air quality. Starting today, residents in affected areas can help improve air quality by burning smart,” said Edwards. This includes: not letting fires smolder, burning only dry wood, and using wood stoves certified by the EPA. Residents should also avoid burning on days with poor air quality as announced by DEC, City & Borough of Juneau, or Fairbanks North Star Borough.

The EPA designations in Fairbanks and Juneau differ. Juneau already has a wood smoke ordinance in place and an ongoing public education campaign.

The state will have an opportunity in February, 2009 to present new data to EPA and request the agency drops its non-attainment designation of Juneau, if 2008 air monitoring data shows the local program has kept pollution levels low. The local wood smoke program must remain in effect to curb pollution on cold, clear days.

Fairbanks will likely need to make a range of choices for control measures from relatively simple approaches, such as temporary wood burning bans and wood stove exchange programs, to more complex programs such as reducing emissions from industrial facilities, power plants and vehicles.

For more information go to:

http://www.dec.state.ak.us/air/anpms/as/pm/pm_bckgrd.htm