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Press Release

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Alaska Submits Request to EPA to Divide Fairbanks North Star Borough PM_{2.5} Nonattainment Area

(JUNEAU, AK) – The State of Alaska has sent a letter requesting that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) divide the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) nonattainment area into two separate nonattainment areas. The current FNSB nonattainment area was originally formed in 2009 when the area failed to meet the federal health-based 24-hour air quality standards for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). Numerous scientific studies have linked PM_{2.5} pollution exposure to a variety of health problems including: decreased lung function, aggravated asthma, development of chronic bronchitis, nonfatal heart attacks, and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

The State recommends Badger Road as the boundary to divide the area. The City of Fairbanks and the western half of the current nonattainment area would be one nonattainment area. The second nonattainment area would contain the area east of Badger Road within the current nonattainment area, including the City of North Pole.

"This request does not come lightly. PM_{2.5} air pollution causes public health impacts and must be addressed. However our current information suggests that there are significant differences between the western and eastern halves of this nonattainment area. Recognizing these differences allows for air quality plans and controls that best fit the situation for each portion of the Fairbanks-North Pole area," said DEC Commissioner Larry Hartig.

In 2014, the western half of the area recorded a clean data¹ year at the

¹ Attainment is demonstrated when the design value, the average of the 98th percentile of three years of monitoring data, is below the standard. A clean data year occurs when the 98th percentile of monitoring data for one year does not exceed the standard. For more information on air quality monitoring data and to view the technical document supporting the request, see http://dec.alaska.gov/air/anpms/comm/fbks_pm2-5_area-separation-request.htm.

downtown Fairbanks air monitors while the eastern half monitored much higher levels of pollution. "With fuel oil prices lower than in recent years, heating with cheaper fuel oil instead of wood this winter could have long-term benefits, especially for the western half," stated Cindy Heil, a Program Manager with DEC's Air Quality Division. "EPA has up to 18 months to respond to the request to divide the area and may not respond until May 2017. We expect the entire nonattainment area to be re-designated from moderate nonattainment to serious nonattainment in June 2016, before the EPA makes a decision on this request. However, if the western half has a clean data year in 2015 and the EPA approves the State's request, then it is possible that the western half may be able to continue to rely on current measures to improve and maintain good air quality and avoid increasingly more burdensome, restrictive control measures."

A clean data year in 2015 for the western half will be important to supporting this request. Citizens in all areas of the nonattainment area can improve air quality by heating with oil, burning dry wood in EPA-certified devices, and following the Air Advisories found on the FNSB [website](#). See DEC's [Burn Wise](#) website for more information.

If the divide request is approved, DEC will be required to maintain two separate plans, one for each area with control measures tailored to the source and magnitude of the pollution. Regardless of the outcome of this request, DEC is committed to working with the FNSB and neighboring communities to get both the western and eastern areas into attainment so that everyone has clean air to breathe.

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