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PADEP Secretary Announces Progress Made in Achieving Cleaner Air

In December 2010, PADEP Secretary John Hanger discussed the progress that Pennsylvania is making to attain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Philadelphia and surrounding counties have reached air quality levels for the 8-hour health-based ozone standard established by the USEPA in 1997. Today, every area in the state has achieved air quality attainment of the 1997 standard, compared to the 37 counties designated by EPA in 2004 as "nonattainment."

In addition, both Liberty and the City of Clairton in Allegheny County attained the PM10 standard for particulate matter smaller than 10 microns (or 1/100 of a millimeter). All areas in the commonwealth, except the Liberty/Clairton area, have attained the annual NAAQS for fine particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns (PM2.5).

The Clean Air Act requires EPA to set national standards for pollutants considered harmful to public health and environment. There are two types of national standards. The primary standards set limits to protect public health, including those prone to respiratory conditions. The secondary standards protect welfare by preventing damage to animals, crops, vegetation, and buildings.

Since 2003, the department has enacted measures to reduce nitrogen oxide (NOx) by 34 percent, sulfur dioxide (SO2) by 41 percent, particulate matter (PM10) by 16 percent, and hazardous air pollutants (HAPs) by 40 percent. A wide variety of strategies contributed to the decline in ozone levels, ranging from cleaner transportation fuels and vehicles through measures to reduce power plant and industrial emissions with pollution control technology.

Since 2003, Pennsylvania has also enacted measures to reduce the transport of ozone and its precursors within the Commonwealth and pushed for such measures throughout the eastern United States. While we have achieved an enormous amount of progress, the battle for clean air is far from over," Hanger stated.

For more information, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us.