

Air Quality Messaging | May 2025

Information provided by Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG)

Background: MAG serves as the regional air quality planning agency for the Maricopa County nonattainment area. In this role, MAG develops regional air quality plans that demonstrate conformity with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations under the Clean Air Act to address air pollution problems. MAG also serves as the lead planning organization for the Pinal County PM-10 and PM-2.5 nonattainment areas, in cooperation with the Sun Corridor Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Together, MAG, Maricopa County, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and the Arizona Department of Transportation have an impressive record in collaborating on regional air quality. Overall, air quality is regulated by federal law and agencies which enforce and implement air quality measures.

Ozone Designation and Classification Information: The Clean Air Act (CAA) requires EPA to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six “criteria” air pollutants that can be harmful to public health and the environment: particulate matter, ozone, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and lead. In 2015, EPA established the current eight-hour ozone NAAQS of 0.070 parts per million (ppm), or 70 parts per billion (ppb).

Any area that does not meet the NAAQS is designated by EPA as a nonattainment area. In 2018, EPA designated and classified the Maricopa nonattainment area as a Marginal nonattainment area with an attainment deadline of Aug. 3, 2021. EPA ozone classifications range from Marginal to Extreme, with increased CAA control measure requirements as areas move from Marginal to Extreme classifications. In October 2022, the Maricopa nonattainment area was reclassified to a Moderate area by EPA with an attainment date of Aug. 3, 2024.

Current Ozone Status: The Maricopa ozone nonattainment area failed to meet the Moderate area attainment date of Aug. 3, 2024 based on air quality monitoring data. The current ozone air quality design value is 80 ppb, which is 10 ppb higher than the standard allows. Attaining the ozone standard has become increasingly challenging in the Maricopa nonattainment area for the following reasons:

- The region has made significant and consistent reductions in the manmade emissions that cause ozone **with work over the last three decades resulting in a more than 70% reduction in total emissions statewide, even as the population has doubled.** Yet, uncontrollable factors are causing ozone concentrations to steadily rise in the nonattainment area since a low in 2017.
- Factors that may partially explain the unexpected rise in ozone include:
 - A substantial increase in wildfires throughout the Western U.S.
 - Transported Pollution: MAG and EPA modeling estimates only 20% of ozone is locally controllable while 80% is imported or from natural sources

- Changes in weather and climate patterns
- Greater Phoenix's ozone situation is very similar to trends observed in intermountain west neighbors such as Denver, Las Vegas and Salt Lake City.
- In late August 2024, EPA provided a conditional approval of Rule 205 which allows mobile source fleet owners that reduce emissions from their fleets to sell those reductions to stationary sources, who can then use them to offset their proposed emission increases.

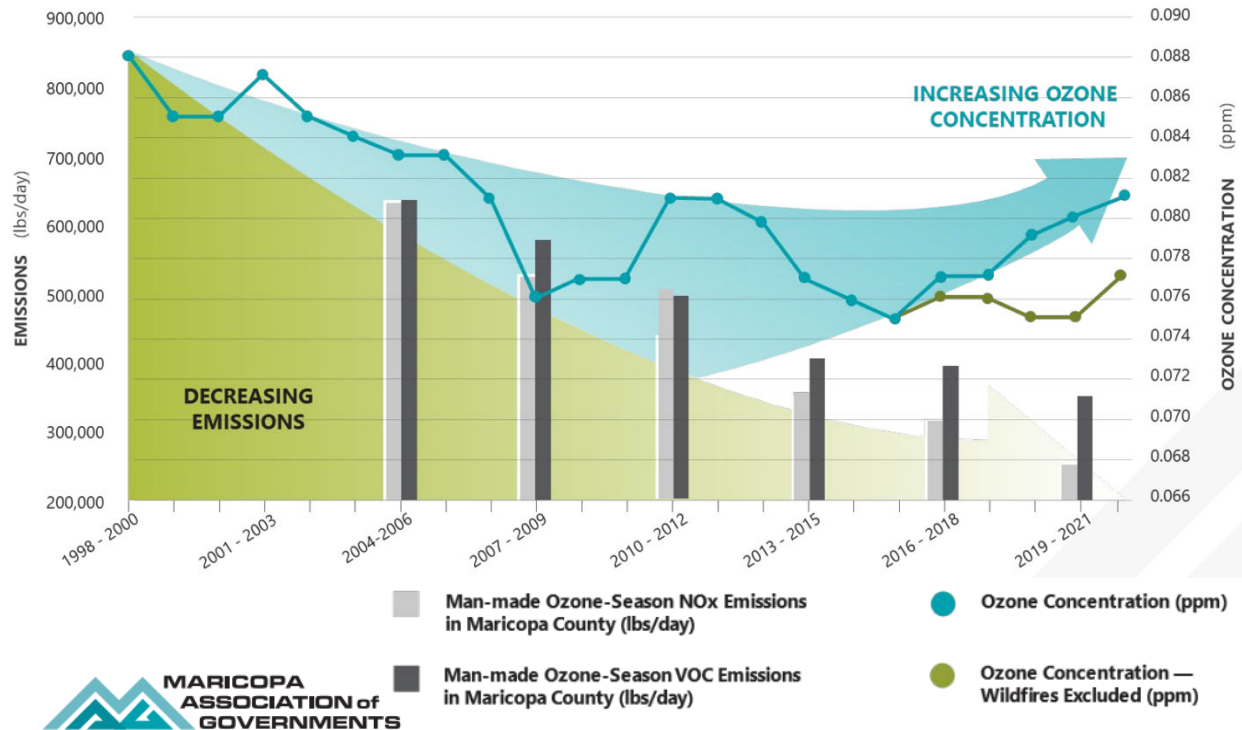
Ozone Updates and Next Steps:

- The EPA announced in April 2025 that it would rescind part of its air pollution guidance to make it easier for regions like metro Phoenix to prove that high ozone levels are in part caused by international pollutants.
- Within the Maricopa Nonattainment Area, the NAAQS has not yet been attained for the 2015 eight-hour ozone standard of 0.070 ppm. The area is currently classified as a Moderate Area under the CAA.
 - MAG has submitted the 2025 Eight-Hour Ozone Plan to meet applicable Moderate Area CAA requirements that remain in effect regardless of the potential reclassification of the Maricopa Nonattainment Area to Serious for the 2015 ozone standard.
 - As a complete nonattainment area plan that addresses Moderate Area requirements has not yet been submitted for the Maricopa Nonattainment Area, the area remains subject to an EPA Finding of Failure to Submit notice until applicable Moderate Area requirements are submitted to EPA. Submittal of the MAG 2025 Eight-Hour Ozone Plan, and a subsequent EPA finding that the MAG 2025 Plan meets EPA completeness criteria, will terminate the pending sanctions associated with the prior EPA Finding of Failure to Submit notice.
- MAG is focused on submitting a full plan in October 2025 that specifically addresses the international transport of ozone and wildfire impacts.

GLOR Project

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) and leading air quality experts across the state and nation have come together to address rising ground-level ozone concentrations in Maricopa County and parts of Pinal County through the Ground Level Ozone Research (GLOR) Project. Consisting of experts from the EPA, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Maricopa County, Maricopa Association of Governments, ASU and U of A, the GLOR Project will create a scientific framework that can inform air quality management strategies.

The project recently reached its \$5.4M funding goal consisting of \$4M from the state and the remainder from sources including APS, SRP, MAG and several contractors. The project will begin in spring 2025 and is expected to take one year to complete.

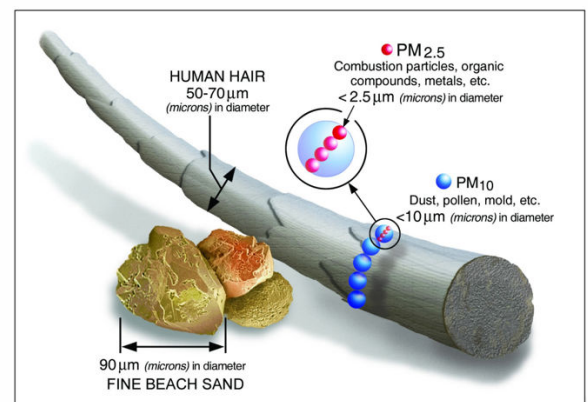


PM-2.5 Update: EPA regulates inhalable particles, known as particulate matter (PM).

- In February 2024, EPA set a new national air quality standard for fine particulates known as PM-2.5 – inhalable particles with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers and smaller (organic compounds, combustion particles, metals, etc.)
- The existing annual standard of 12.0 micrograms per cubic meter was strengthened to 9.0 micrograms per cubic meter.
 - Maricopa County met the previous standard but does not meet the new standard.
- Factors that frequently contribute to increased PM-2.5 in Maricopa County include wintertime residential woodburning and use of consumer fireworks.
- More information on PM Pollution: <https://www.epa.gov/pm-pollution>

PM-2.5 Next Steps:

- On Sept. 23, 2024, ADEQ proposed draft nonattainment area boundary recommendations in Maricopa and Pinal counties for the new, stricter annual PM -2.5 standard.
- Formal comments on the draft boundaries were submitted to ADEQ on Oct. 24, 2024. ADEQ will submit final recommendations to the Governor by Jan. 7, 2025.
- The Governor must submit boundary recommendations to the EPA by Feb. 7, 2025.



Source: EPA