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News Release

End of 2009 Ozone Season Finds AACOG Region in Compliance with Federal Air Quality Standards

San Antonio, November 2, 2009 – When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) prescribed a significantly lower threshold for allowable ozone pollution in 2008, many predicted that the San Antonio region would join the ranks of numerous, primarily-urban areas of the country that are designated as “nonattainment” of the federal ozone standard. However, the 2009 ozone season, which ended on October 31, finds the Alamo region still in attainment of the more stringent standard, an accomplishment that likely means San Antonio will maintain its status as the largest U.S. city in full compliance with all national air quality standards. This accomplishment may be attributed in part to air quality improvements originating with the Early Action Compact of our Clean Air Plan¹, to the independent efforts of local governments, schools, businesses, and other organizations to conserve the use of fossil fuels (for example through the use of hybrid engines) and reduce ozone-producing practices (such as vehicle idling), to the US economy’s influence on general production and consumption trends in the region, and several other factors.

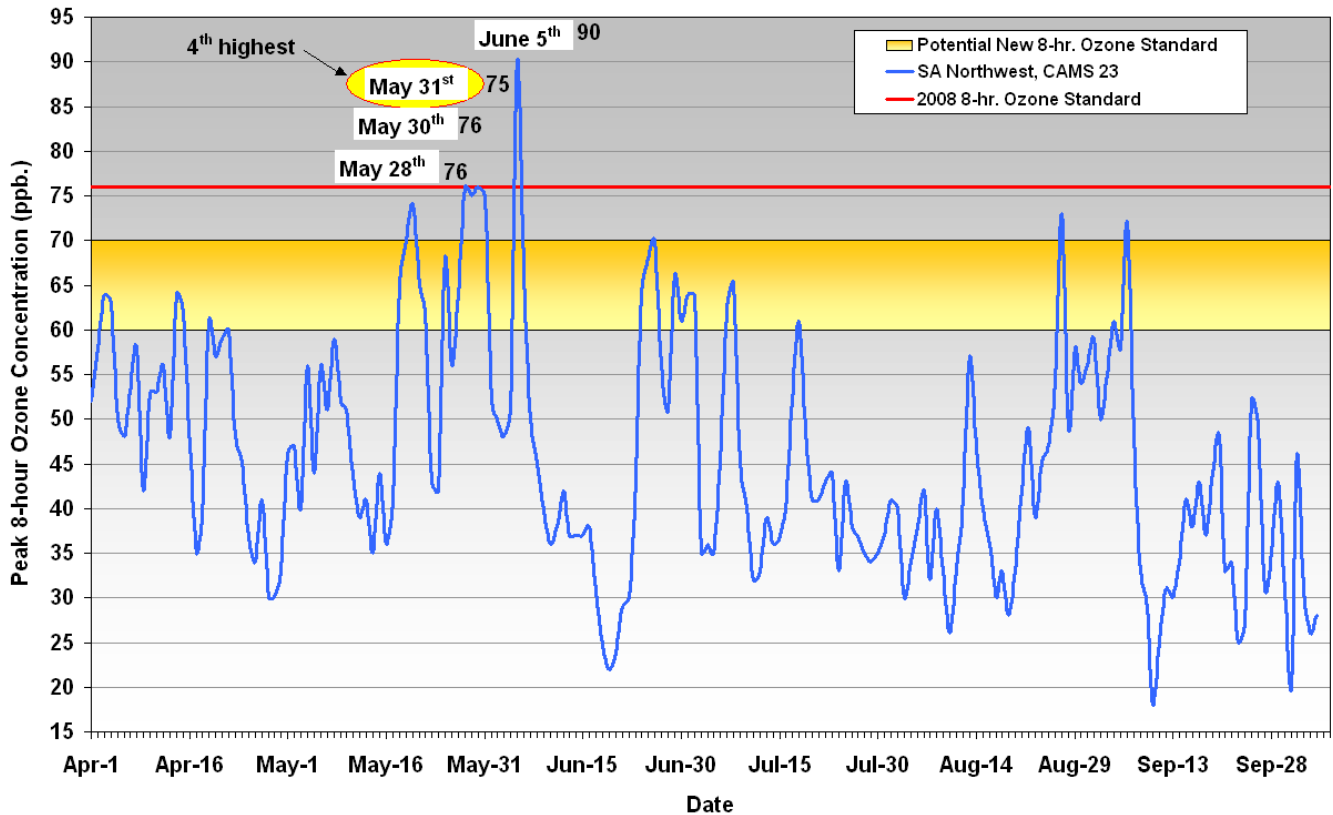
Based on a review of more than 1,700 scientific studies, the EPA strengthened the ozone standard in 2008 to improve the law’s ability to protect human health and the environment. According to the 2008 standard, our area would remain in attainment if our fourth highest eight-hour average reading from any one of the three designated monitors in the Alamo region were no higher than 75 parts per billion (ppb) of ground-level ozone over a three-year period of time. Final designations of attainment under the 2008 revision were expected to be announced by the EPA no later than March 2010 based on data collected throughout the U.S. during the ozone seasons of 2007, 2008, and 2009. Our fourth highest reading for each of those years was 71, 78, and 75 ppb, respectively. Therefore, our three-year overall average was 74ppb, just under the EPA’s threshold of 75ppb.

The EPA recently announced, however, that it has been reviewing the analysis of recent health impact studies and, based on the recommendations from its scientific advisory committees; it may make adjustments to the clean air threshold set at 75ppb of ozone in 2008. The EPA plans to announce its decision in December of 2009. The EPA has noted that the ozone standards set in 2008 were not as protective of human health as recommended by EPA’s panel of science advisors, the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, which may indicate a willingness to revise the ozone standard to more stringent levels.

As apparent on the chart below, if the EPA changes its clean air standard to a lower acceptable level of ozone, our ability to remain in attainment of the clean air standard is significantly impacted. The chart shows three times in which we surpassed the acceptable threshold (indicated by the red line) this year; on May 28, May 30, and June 5. Fortunately, it is the fourth reading that the EPA considers when determining whether or not we are in violation of its standards, and with our fourth highest reading of 75ppb on May 31, we have remained in attainment during 2009. The yellow bar, however, indicates the range in which it is anticipated that the EPA may lower the threshold for acceptable levels of ozone (between 60 and 70ppb).

¹The 2002 Early Action Compact is an agreement among the governments of the four-county San Antonio Metropolitan Statistical Area (Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe and Wilson Counties), the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and the EPA that commits the region to evaluation and implementation of a Clean Air Plan containing ozone pollution control strategies designed to reduce ozone pollution to comply with federal, health-based standards.

Peak 8-Hour Ozone at San Antonio Northwest CAMS 23, April 1st - Oct. 7th, 2009



Because a designation of nonattainment would bring possible economic, industrial and transportation regulations and restrictions to our area, AACOG and its air quality partners are closely attuned to the EPA developments in this regard. In the meantime, it strives toward bringing cleaner air to the region through its ongoing planning, analysis, collaboration, outreach, and educational efforts.

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