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**Northeast States Say EPA Failed to Follow the Science
in Changing National Smog Standards**

March 12, 2008 (Boston, MA) – The new air quality standards for ozone announced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today provide additional, but inadequate protection of public health and the environment. NESCAUM (Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management) is disappointed that, once again, EPA ignored the unanimous recommendations of the panel of outside scientific experts created by federal law to advise the Agency in setting new national air pollution standards.

EPA was under a court-order to revisit the ozone (commonly called “smog”) standard, which was set at 0.08 parts per million (ppm) averaged over eight hours. EPA’s Clean Air Science Advisory Committee (CASAC) recommended that it be lowered to within a range between 0.070 and 0.060 ppm. A letter to EPA from a group of northeast and mid-Atlantic governors on October 9, 2007 supported this recommendation. Instead, EPA adopted an ozone standard of 0.075 ppm, averaged over eight hours. “The science clearly shows that the former standard and EPA’s revised standard do not adequately protect people from the harm caused by ozone,” stated Arthur Marin, NESCAUM’s Executive Director. “EPA had the scientific evidence and the unanimous advice of its expert panel to set a protective standard, but chose to do otherwise.”

Ground-level ozone is a powerful respiratory irritant. Exposure to elevated levels can reduce lung function, exacerbate asthma attacks, inflame and damage cells that line the lungs, and aggravate chronic cardio-pulmonary diseases. Symptoms may include: coughing; shortness of breath; increased susceptibility to respiratory infection; nose and throat irritation; chest pain; and other respiratory ailments. While ozone pollution is a clear threat to those with respiratory disease, it can also affect healthy children and adults engaged in outdoor activities on smoggy summer days.

Health studies performed in the U.S. and Europe have independently and consistently found strong links between increases in ground-level ozone and the risk of premature death. Recent studies also indicate that ozone may contribute to heart problems. Since these health consequences have not previously been accounted for, the costs of not sufficiently reducing ozone pollution are far higher than once believed.

The public health differences between EPA’s 0.075 ppm standard and 0.070 ppm (the high end of the CASAC recommendation) are substantial. In the eight-state NESCAUM region alone, some 4.5 million people live in areas that are expected in 2009 to achieve 0.075 ppm but not 0.070 ppm for ozone. This means that some 4.5 million people will remain exposed indefinitely to the adverse health effects that caused the CASAC to recommend a level of 0.070 ppm or less.

EPA has set a second ozone standard to protect welfare – including economically important agricultural crops and forests – identical to the health-based standard. This decision is equally misguided, and ignores a wealth of scientific observations and research showing that long-term, cumulative exposure to ozone harms agriculture and forest ecosystems. The CASAC concluded that protecting crops and ecosystems requires a second ozone standard substantially different from the health-based standard in averaging time, level, and form. The NESCAUM states agree that a second ozone standard based on cumulative, seasonal ozone exposure is appropriate and necessary. Areas in the Northeast are already experiencing plant and tree damage at ozone concentrations below EPA’s new standard, and will continue to be adversely affected in the years ahead.

The EPA’s failure to more fully protect the public’s health and environment is also bad news for industry. “Regulated companies seek certainty in standard setting in order to make appropriate long term planning decisions,” said Arthur Marin, NESCAUM’s Executive Director. “EPA’s failure to establish adequately protective standards now means a future tightening is likely.”

“The cost of attaining a health protective ozone standard will be far less than the health and welfare costs associated with the continued exposure of our citizens to unhealthful air,” stated Stephen Majkut, Chief of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management’s Office of Air Resources and Chair of the NESCAUM Board of Directors.

NESCAUM is the regional association of state air pollution control agencies representing Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

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