

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**EPA'S PROPOSED AIR QUALITY STANDARDS FOR FINE PARTICLE POLLUTION  
ARE INSUFFICIENT TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH**

December 20, 2005 (Boston, MA) – The Northeast states expressed disappointment with today's proposal by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator to revise the national ambient air quality standards for fine particulate matter (PM-2.5) air pollution. "NESCAUM commends the EPA staff for its exhaustive review of the thousands of peer-reviewed studies linking health effects with exposure to PM-2.5 and its science-based recommendations in support of more health-protective PM-2.5 standards," stated Arthur Marin, NESCAUM's Executive Director. "Regretfully, the Agency's proposal is not consistent with the recommendations of its staff."

With the Administrator's proposal, EPA has reached a critical milestone in its mandated review of the PM-2.5 annual and 24-hour standards. The Clean Air Act requires EPA to base its standards solely on the best scientific assessment of the need to protect public health and welfare, including populations most at risk to air pollution exposure, with an adequate margin of safety.

"Fine particulate matter poses one of the greatest health risks in our region and across our nation," stated William O'Sullivan, Director of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Air Quality Division and current NESCAUM Chair. "EPA missed a golden opportunity to put this country on a course to significantly reduce the serious threat posed by exposure to this pollutant."

EPA staff found that new, more restrictive annual and 24-hour standards are needed to prevent thousands of premature deaths around the country each year. The independent Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC), which advises EPA on air quality standards, also concluded that the current annual and 24-hour fine particulate matter standards are inadequate to protect public health, and that both standards must be tightened. Based on the conclusions of the EPA staff, the CASAC recommendations and our own analysis of PM-2.5 levels in the Northeast, NESCAUM supports a revised 24-hour standard of 30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  and an annual standard of 12  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .

"Given the wealth of supportive scientific evidence available upon which to base this decision, we expected EPA to propose more stringent standards," stated Mr. Marin. "Unfortunately, the Administrator's proposal would only marginally improve public health protection in the Northeast U.S. when much greater protection is necessary." While EPA proposes to tighten the

current 24-hour standard from 65 to 35  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , typical peak PM-2.5 levels in the Northeast are in the 30 to 35  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  range.

With respect to the annual standard, EPA proposes to leave it unchanged at 15 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . “This non-action would restrict states’ ability to decrease air pollution to levels deemed by current science as necessary to protect public health,” added Marin.

A large fraction of the region’s total population is considered susceptible to both short- and long-term PM-2.5 health effects, including the roughly 40 percent who are young and old, the 20 percent of adults with cardiopulmonary conditions, and the 15 percent of children with respiratory allergies or lifetime asthma. Moreover, about 70 percent of the Northeast population lives in urban areas with the region’s highest PM-2.5 levels.

“The Northeast states would like to see air quality in the region substantially better than EPA’s proposed standards in order to protect the public from the health effects associated with exposure to fine particulate matter,” Mr. O’Sullivan stated.

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

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