

Air Quality

The Clean Air Act (CAA) was passed in 1970 and authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish the National Ambient Quality Standards (NAAQS) which regulates air emissions from stationary and mobile sources. It was amended in 1977 and 1990 primarily to set new dates for achieving attainment of NAAQS since many areas of the country had failed to meet deadlines.

Clean air is such a basic human requirement that one would think there would be general public agreement on the issue. It is actually a controversial and complex issue. Humans also need jobs and need to travel and both of these impacts the air quality. The issue is further complicated by carbon emissions and climate change.

For Agency projects, the Environmental Report (ER) should cover any construction and facility operation air quality issues. The majority of Agency projects fall within acceptable levels of air emissions. The ER should note this if it applies.

The unusual projects that may require an in depth review would include projects which incinerate items on site (burn waste), produce products which may become airborne (paint shops), store or use certain chemicals which can escape into the air (refrigeration equipment), and projects with high vehicle or equipment emissions (factories). Even small projects which typically would not have any air quality issues may have back-up diesel generators which could emit pollutants.

Identify any source which could impact the air quality and address what measures are to be taken for mitigation. Note projects which require a regulatory permit to operate due to air emissions. If applicable, contact the specific regulatory agency for comments.

Another item to include in the ER is if the project site is in an “attainment area” (air quality is cleaner than the primary standard) or a “nonattainment area” (air quality is below the primary standard). Regulations differ for both areas. A map of nonattainment areas can be obtained from the following web site: <http://epamap14.epa.gov/ejmap/entry.html> .

The general use of this web site is explained in the Environmental Justice section. Under the “Select Map Contents” click on the “Nonattainment Area” and then check both the “PM.25” and “Ozone 8-hour” selections. The scale of the map will need to be between a State level and a County level, because the areas are designated by county. You can zoom in and out as required to print out a map for your particular project site. Texas has only the Ozone 8-hour areas which are marked in dark blue.

Other web sites or agencies which could be a resource for information includes the EPA Region 6 found here: <http://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/region6.html> and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) found here: <http://www.tceq.state.tx.us> .