

**Opening Statement of Janet McCabe Acting Assistant
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Hearing on EPA's Proposed Ozone National Ambient Air
Quality Standards
Environment and Public Works
Clean Air and Nuclear Safety Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
December 17, 2014**

Chairman Whitehouse, Ranking Member Sessions, members of the subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on EPA's recently proposed updates to the Ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Because the air we breathe is so important to our overall health and well-being, the Clean Air Act requires EPA to review the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) every five years to make sure that they continue "to protect public health with an adequate margin of safety." For at-risk groups, including the estimated 25.9 million people who have asthma in the United States (almost 7.1 million of whom are children), this is critical. Establishing and implementing a NAAQS is a two-step process for improving air quality. Setting the standards is step one – it is about defining what is clean air to protect public health. Implementing the standards is step two, and involves the federal government, states, and tribes if they wish to, putting measures

and programs in place to reduce harmful pollution. We will continue to work together with state, tribal and local partners to build on the progress we have already made and meet any revised standard over time in a flexible and cost-effective way. The Federal government also promulgates regulations designed to reduce emissions, helping states meet the NAAQS.

For this review, EPA examined thousands of scientific studies, including more than 1,000 new studies published since EPA last revised the standards in 2008. And based on the law, based on a thorough review of the science, based on the recommendations of the agency's independent scientific advisors, and based on the assessment of EPA scientists and technical experts, the Administrator's judgment was to propose to strengthen the standards to within a range of 65 to 70 parts per billion to better protect Americans' health and welfare. This is a proposal, and taking public comment on a range is exactly how the process is supposed to work. The agency welcomes comments on all aspects of the proposal, including on setting the level as low as 60 parts per billion, and will accept comment on retaining the existing standard.

We are also proposing to update the Air Quality Index for ozone to reflect a revised standard if one is finalized. The AQI is the tool that gives Americans real time information to help them make the best choices to protect themselves and their families. And we're proposing to make updates to monitoring and permitting requirements, to smooth the transition to any revised standards and assure that the public has full information about air quality. EPA is proposing to lengthen the ozone monitoring season for 33 states to match the season when ozone levels can be elevated. All of these updates are designed to ensure that Americans are alerted when ozone approaches levels that may be unhealthy, especially for sensitive people.

To protect the environment from damaging levels of ground-level ozone as required by the Clean Air Act, the EPA has also proposed to revise the secondary standard. Based upon new studies that add to the evidence that repeated exposure to ozone can stunt the growth of some trees and damage some plants, the Administrator judges that proposing a secondary standard within the range of 65 to 70 parts per billion would protect the public welfare, particularly against harm to trees, plants and ecosystems.

The science clearly tells us that exposure to sufficiently elevated ozone levels poses a real threat to our health, especially to growing children, older Americans, those of us with heart or lung conditions, and those who are active or work outside. The Administrator's proposal to strengthen the standards is designed to better protect children and families from the health effects of ozone pollution.

For example, we estimate that meeting a level of 70 parts per billion would prevent an estimated 330,000 missed school days, 320,000 asthma attacks, and 710 to 1,400 or more premature deaths per year. Meeting a standard of 65 parts per billion is projected to provide additional benefits.

In addition to giving families across the country an improved quality of life, the benefits of avoiding these health effects are significant. EPA estimates that meeting the standards will yield health benefits valued at \$6.4 to \$13 billion annually in 2025 for a standard of 70 ppb, and \$19 to \$38 billion annually in 2025 for a standard of 65 ppb, nationwide, excluding California. These estimated benefits include the value of avoiding asthma attacks, heart attacks, missed school days and premature deaths, among other health effects. EPA analyzed the estimated benefits and

costs for California separately, because a number of areas in California would have longer to meet the proposed standards under the Act, due to the unique challenges facing the state. Benefits of meeting the proposed standards in California add to the nationwide benefits after 2025, with values estimated at \$1.1 to \$2 billion annually after 2025 for a standard of 70 ppb, and \$2.2 to \$4.1 billion for a standard of 65 ppb.

States will ultimately determine what measures – beyond federal ones – are appropriate for their clean air plans, but EPA has estimated illustrative costs at \$3.9 billion in 2025 for a standard of 70 ppb, and \$15 billion for a standard at 65 ppb, nationwide except for California. Estimated costs in California post-2025 are \$800 million for a standard of 70 ppb and \$1.6 billion for a standard of 65 ppb. The estimated benefits outweigh the estimated costs by as much as a ratio of 3 to 1.

Implementing a NAAQS has always been and will continue to be a federal, state, and tribal partnership. EPA stands ready to do our part to assist states and tribes with pollution control programs and to streamline implementation. Local communities, states, tribes and EPA have already shown that we can reduce ground-level ozone while our economy continues to thrive. Nationally,

since 1980, average ozone levels have fallen by a third. And 90 percent of the areas originally identified as not meeting the ozone standards set in 1997 now meet those standards. We have reduced air pollution and our economy has grown. We fully expect that this progress will continue. Existing and proposed federal measures like vehicle standards and power plant rules are leading to substantial reductions in ozone nationwide, which will help improve air quality and help many areas meet any revised standard.

Conclusion

Exposures to ground-level ozone, a key component of smog, can have very serious consequences for our families' health and for the environment.

We are looking forward to hearing what the public thinks about the proposal. Once it's published in the Federal Register, there will be a 90-day comment period, and we'll be holding three public hearings as well, as we work toward completing the final standards by October 1, 2015.

I look forward to discussing the proposal over the next several months, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.