

# Environmental protection agency finalizes stronger air quality standards

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has introduced a tougher air quality standard that takes aim at fine particulate matter by lowering the allowable annual concentration of the deadly pollutant that each state can have.

"This final air quality standard will save lives and make all people healthier, especially within America's most vulnerable and overburdened communities," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in an agency news release announcing the change. "Cleaner air means that our children have brighter futures, and people can live more productive and active lives."

The EPA noted that "a broad and growing body of science" links particulate matter to serious, and often deadly, illnesses such as [lung cancer](#), heart disease, [kidney disease](#), neurological disorders, asthma attacks, and stroke.

Reaction to the new standard was enthusiastic. "The Biden administration is taking lifesaving action to protect people and rein in deadly pollution," Abigail Dillen, president of the nonprofit law organization Earthjustice, said in the EPA news release.

"The science is crystal clear. Soot, otherwise known as fine particle pollution, is a killer. It is driving [heart disease](#), our asthma epidemic, and other serious illnesses. The people who suffer most are children and older Americans who live in communities of color and low-income communities."

Before the new air quality standard was announced, the allowable annual concentration of particulate matter within a state could not exceed  $12 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . However, the American Lung Association and other health groups have called for that limit to be lowered to  $8 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . The new EPA standard hews more closely to that tougher standard: It sets an annual threshold of  $9 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .

The EPA estimated that the new standard would prevent up to 4,500 [premature deaths](#) in the first year the new standard is fully enforced; states will not need to meet the tougher limit until 2032.

The agency also noted that the lower limit will yield up to \$46 billion in health benefits by lowering the number of lost workdays and reducing emergency room visits.

**More information:** [More Information](#)

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