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Background Brief on...

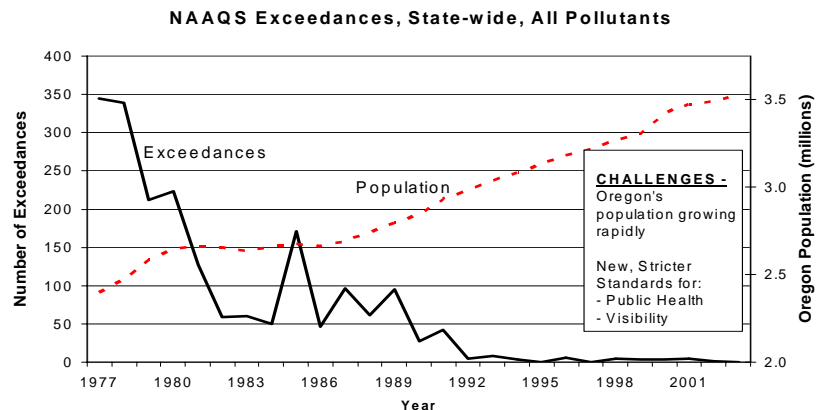
Air Quality

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Background

In 1955, Congress enacted the first air quality legislation with the passage of the Air Pollution Control Act. Major amendments in 1970, 1977, and 1990 resulted in what is known as the Clean Air Act (CAA). Current federal law addresses ambient air quality standards, hazardous air pollutants, new source performance standards, and new source review; the latter requiring the best available technology in air pollution control equipment for facilities that are major sources of contaminants. EPA has delegated implementation of most Clean Air Act requirements to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) codified in ORS Chapter 468A.

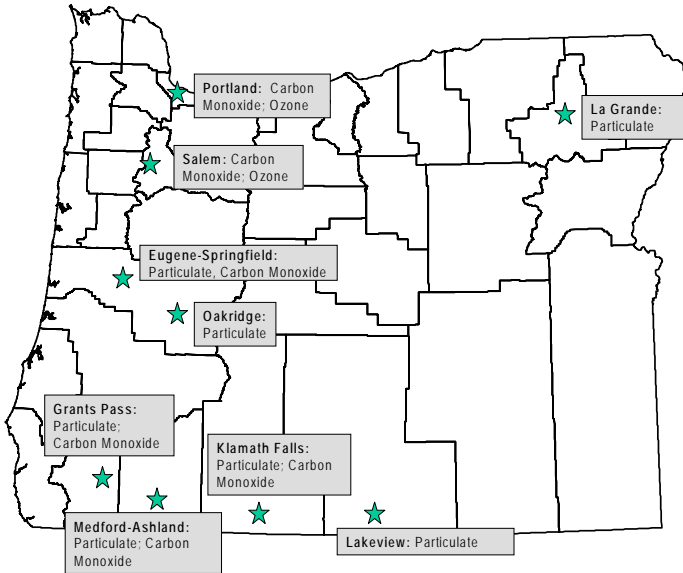
Air Pollution Trends in Oregon



Status

In 1980, only 30 percent of Oregonians lived in areas where the air met National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Today, 100 percent of Oregonians live in areas that meet these standards. Nonetheless, some pollutants are near or temporarily exceed thresholds, and population growth presents an ongoing challenge in continuing to meet the NAAQS. The pollutants of concern in Oregon include ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulates. The map on page two identifies areas that did not meet standards in the past, but are now, either following plans to maintain clean air, or in line for plan development. Improvements are continuing, such as efforts in Portland and Medford that have virtually eliminated ozone violations. Once an area has met standards, the Clean Air Act also requires continued pollution reduction measures and ongoing oversight by DEQ. The chart above illustrates the progress made in reducing exceedances of air pollution standards while population continues to grow. DEQ will continue to closely monitor compliance with standards and work to prevent violations.

Areas that have violated federal standards



Authorities

EPA has delegated implementation of most Clean Air Act requirements in Oregon to the Department of Environmental Quality, except in Lane County where the Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority has primary jurisdiction. EPA retains partial authority in several programs such as standard approval for hazardous pollutants and new source performance. EPA also has the authority to “overfile,” or bring action against pollution sources if they believe enforcement at the state or regional level is inadequate. To date, DEQ has been successful in preventing federal overfiles. Also, EPA conducts some national enforcement actions against industrial sectors that can include Oregon sources, such as past actions taken against the wood products industries.

Management Strategies

The primary way air pollution is controlled is through comprehensive airshed planning, with help from local advisory committees. These plans develop strategies tailored to meet local issues and needs.

- Strategies to reduce particulate pollution (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) include: emission reductions from woodstoves, outdoor burning, and wood-fired boilers.
- Strategies to reduce smog (ozone and oxides of nitrogen) include: vehicle inspections and emission reductions from industrial solvents.

For industrial sources, these strategies are implemented through permitting programs. When a new facility is built that will have significant emissions, or an existing facility makes changes that affect emission levels, a new source review is triggered. In addition, public education, such as Clean Air Action Days and DEQ & A’s, a series of public service radio spots, are strategies developed to address nonpoint source air pollution. DEQ is also leading several innovative initiatives to reduce particulate and toxic emissions from heavy-duty diesel trucks.

Toxic Air Contaminants

Since the late 1990s, DEQ has increased focus on the emerging area of air toxics. A recent EPA study estimated that concentrations of 16 toxic air pollutants in Oregon exceed generally acceptable health risk levels. Urban residents are exposed to the greatest risk where emissions from sources such as vehicles, gas stations, and home heating with wood combine. Concerns for rural residents are due to elevated air toxics associated with various forms of burning.

A comprehensive air toxics program was adopted in 2003. According to DEQ, the program uses an innovative approach to reduce individuals’ exposure to toxic air pollutants through community-based planning. The elements include determining health risk concentration thresholds, or benchmarks, for toxic air pollutants; identifying geographic areas with the highest risk of harmful health effects; and developing and implementing plans to reduce the release of toxic chemicals. Implementing administrative rules lay out processes to identify and prioritize geographic areas of concern and to create local plans to reduce emissions, but do not prescribe methods to meet reduction targets. Measures selected through these processes will be submitted for approval or adoption under state or local authorities.

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