



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

APR 14 2011

OFFICE OF
AIR AND RADIATION

The Honorable Mike Johanns
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Johanns:

Thank you for your letter of February 15, 2011, co-signed by 32 of your colleagues, expressing your concerns over the ongoing review of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for particulate matter (PM). The Administrator asked that I respond to your letter.

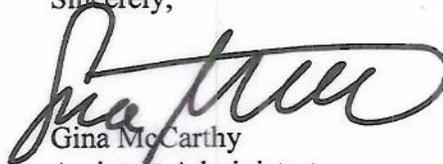
I appreciate the importance of NAAQS decisions to state and local governments, in particular to areas with agricultural communities, and I respect your perspectives and opinions. I also recognize the work that states have undertaken to improve air quality across the country. The NAAQS are set to protect public health from outdoor air pollution, and are not focused on any specific category of sources or any particular activity (including activities related to agriculture or rural roads). The NAAQS are based on consideration of the scientific evidence and technical information regarding health and welfare effects of the pollutants for which they are set.

No final decisions have been made on revising the PM NAAQS. In fact, we have not yet released a formal proposal. Currently, we continue to develop options, including the option of retaining the current 24-hour coarse PM standard. To facilitate a better understanding of the potential impacts of PM NAAQS standards on agricultural and rural communities, EPA recently held six roundtable discussions around the country. This is all part of the open and transparent rulemaking process that provides Americans with many opportunities to offer their comments and thoughts. Your comments will be fully considered as we proceed with our deliberations.

Under the Clean Air Act, decisions regarding the NAAQS must be based solely on an evaluation of the scientific evidence as it pertains to health and environmental effects. Thus, the Agency is prohibited from considering costs in setting the NAAQS. But cost can be - and is - considered in developing the control strategies to meet the standards (i.e., during the implementation phase). Furthermore, I want to assure you that EPA does appreciate the importance of the decisions on the PM NAAQS to agricultural communities. We remain committed to common sense approaches to improving air quality across the country without placing undue burden on agricultural and rural communities.

Again, the Administrator and I thank you for your letter. If you have further questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Josh Lewis in EPA's Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations at (202) 564-2095.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gina McCarthy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "M".

Gina McCarthy
Assistant Administrator