

Smog cutback will challenge Upstate

Response to new rule to affect jobs, growth

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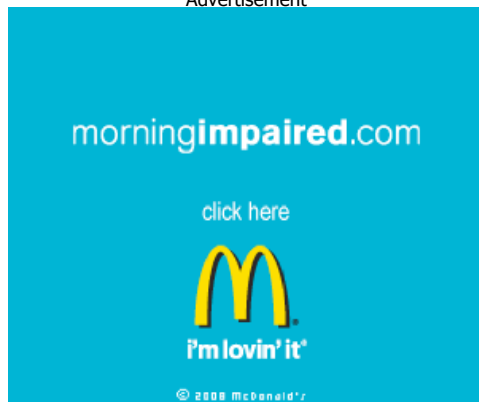
Upstate business and environmental leaders say the tougher air pollution standards the EPA announced Wednesday will be a hurdle worth jumping for improved public health and that the area's growth can continue so long as it is well-managed.

"We can make this a doomsday if we want to, but I don't think that's necessary," said Hal Johnson, president of Upstate Alliance, which markets the Upstate to businesses.

"The reality is the EPA has the same standards across the country," he said. "We're not in this alone."

The ground-level ozone cap will shrink from 80 parts per billion to 75, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson announced Wednesday.

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Ozone, or smog, rules were last revised in 1997.

A court ordered the agency to revisit the standards after the American Lung Association filed a suit, according to the Gannett News Service.

Based on its most recent data, the state Department of Health and Environmental Control estimates nine areas out of 21 that DHEC monitors wouldn't comply, according to DHEC spokesman Thom Berry. That could mean a ban on new roads and also make the permitting of new or expanded industry a lengthier, more cumbersome process.

Based on DHEC data from 2005 until 2007, monitors in Spartanburg, Anderson, Abbeville, York, Chester, Newberry, Richland, Kershaw and Aiken counties wouldn't comply with the new standards.

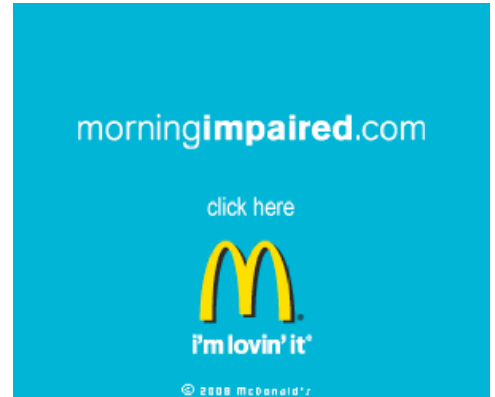
The area of compliance for a monitor can be larger or smaller than a county, Berry said. Greenville and Spartanburg counties fall under the Spartanburg monitor.

The new standard won't be effective until 2010, according to the EPA. And DHEC officials said the EPA will allow states designated as nonattaining in 2010 to revise a state implementation plan to meet the standards within three years.

Ground-level ozone forms when emissions from power plants, motor vehicle exhaust, industrial facilities, gasoline vapors and chemical solvents "cook" in the sun.

The EPA estimates that the final standards will yield health benefits valued between \$2 billion and \$19 billion.

"Those benefits include preventing cases of bronchitis, aggravated asthma, hospital and emergency room visits, nonfatal heart attacks and premature death, among others," the EPA statement said.



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Bad air: On a hot summer day, a haze of pollution hangs over Interstate 85 in Greenville.
HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

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Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, a nonprofit that promotes clean air and water, said it will be critical to implement solid land-use and transportation plans.

"If the Upstate finally gets serious about managing growth, we can come into compliance with the more stringent standards without much difficulty," Wyche said.

"The overriding purpose of the Clean Air Act is the protection of public health, and the evidence is now overwhelming that a more stringent ozone standard is needed to accomplish that."

Upstate Alliance's Johnson said health can't be minimized.

"What we have to do is just make sure we educate the companies coming in what the standards are and then we recruit the kind of companies that are going to be a good fit for the Upstate," Johnson said.

He pointed out that three counties in the Upstate succeeded in meeting previous standards by working together.

The Upstate was out of compliance for ground-level ozone but took enough action in a five-year plan to squeeze under the wire.

Ben Haskew, president of the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce, said the new standards will mean continued efforts to strike a balance.

"It's so very important to economic development -- whether you're talking about new locations of business or expansions like we witnessed this week with BMW, we need to have that balance between good air quality and our interests in continuing to see our economy grow," Haskew said.

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diamonddave I live in Pickens County, which has acquired the reputation of becoming the biggest bedroom county in the upstate. This is due to the fact that for the past 25 years or so, while Greenville was getting away from it's 1-time notariety as "Textile Capital of the World" & diversified it's manufacturing base, Pickens County's politicians were in the pockets of the textile & apparel manufacturers, which had a vested interest in controlling what types of industries & how much of it came into the area around their operations. This is still as factual as it ever was, even after closing all but a handful of operations, that small handful stiiil runs the county. Thus, every day, a msssive amount of commuters, vehicles occupied only by the driver, commute to jobs outside the county, which is obviously a major contributor to bad quality air in the area. Over this 25 years or so, 1st there was a denial, but folks that lost jobs due to plant closings & had to find work out of county knew better, Then, when the matter became a political football, it was 1 lame excuse affter another, lack of sewer system, no immediate access to I-85, in fact, they even tried to claim that there was a labor shortage. They might try once again to use bad air quality as an excuse not to bring industry into

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Pickens County, while BMW expands & suppliers flock into the area around the Greer with no apparent prroblem with regard to air quality there. It would appear that if you spread out some of this develpopment toward the west side of Greenville & east side of Easley & the Powdersville, you would cut down the amount of vehicle miles being driven, & this would have a positive effect on air quality. Well, it's just a thought 🤔

diamonddave Posted: Thu Mar 13, 2008 4:52 pm

Autumn

Greenville started talking about mass transit ten years ago. Some form of it should have been implemented then. From experience, it takes a couple of decades for mass transit to be accepted by all. I grew up with mass transit (area wide bus service), so I am used to it. There are very few places to live in Greenville that one can walk to satisfy all of their needs.

Autumn Posted: Thu Mar 13, 2008 11:43 am

UpstateBooster

Growth isn't bad at all. It's what keeps unemployment low, and real estate prices from tanking. RESPONSIBLE growth is needed (adaptive re-use, strict environmental ordnances, etc). I also think this story, and the logic behind punitive measures for not meeting ozone standards, are using the wrong logic.

They would punish drivers who MUST use their cars in our society, to get to work, buy groceries, etc by cramming more & more people onto the same, unimproved roads. Madness.

What SHOULD happen is a concerted push at all levels of govt for comprehensive mass transit. Make current transit less polluting, so we wouldn't be trading one form of pollution for another. And, for God's sake, EDUCATE the public about the benefits. Americans aren't going to give up their cars, until they can see it will immediately benefit them. We Americans are a myopic bunch, and need to be led by the nose sometimes.

UpstateBooster Posted: Thu Mar 13, 2008 6:40 am

ricknupstate What is this obsession with growth in the upstate? It's only cramming more people into less space, using our natural resources, destroying the environment, and limiting individual freedoms. The US economy is based on this same premise and it is insane. What is going to happen when we there is no more room for growth? Why doesn't someone run for office on an antigrowth platform. He would get my vote.

ricknupstate Posted: Thu Mar 13, 2008 6:19 am

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