

Valley Watch may get results

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Evansville-based environmental group Valley Watch is involved in a lawsuit that may force the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to take a look at some of its air pollution standards for the first time in 10 years.

The EPA this week announced it has begun the process of updating air quality criteria for sulfur oxides, a major pollutant primarily associated with coal-burning power plants.

A notice was published in the Federal Register on Monday calling for the public to submit information and data about sulfur oxides to the agency.

The notice came three months after Valley Watch and the Tuscon, Ariz.-based Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit seeking to force the EPA to review and set new standards for both sulfur oxide and nitrogen oxide pollution.

The EPA has not reviewed its health-based standards for sulfur oxide since 1996, even though the Clean Air Act requires it to review the standard every five years. The lawsuit charges that the EPA's standard for sulfur dioxide has not been actually changed since 1971. That lawsuit is still pending in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia where the EPA has until May 30 to respond. The appropriate agency officials could not be reached



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Wednesday afternoon to discuss the timing of the agency's review.

A spokesman for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management said Wednesday that the state agency had no comment on the new review of the sulfur oxide standard.

However, he said the state is expecting more scrubbers for removing sulfur dioxide to be installed once the EPA's Clean Air Interstate Rule becomes effective.

Sulfur oxides include pollutants such as sulfur dioxide, sulfur trioxide and sulfuric acid, according to the EPA. These pollutants, when breathed, can cause respiratory ailments.

Also, according to the EPA, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides react with other substances in the air to create acidic rain, fog, snow and even dry particles which can be carried for hundreds of miles.

Acid rain affects the environment by damaging forests, crops, soil and surface waters. It also may accelerate decay of building materials and paints.

Vectren and Alcoa Warrick Operations are installing pollution controls for sulfur dioxides and nitrogen oxides at their power plants in Warrick County that company officials say will reduce most of those pollution emissions when they come on line.

Those controls are scheduled to be in operation in 2007 for Vectren and 2010 for Alcoa.