

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2019/12/17/stories/1061835677>

AIR POLLUTION

EPA lowers Denver area's quality rating to 'serious'

Published: Tuesday, December 17, 2019

EPA has lowered the Denver area's ozone status from "moderate" to "serious." Visit Denver

EPA has downgraded the air quality rating of Colorado's biggest population center.

The agency finalized the move yesterday, lowering the ozone status of Denver and eight other northern Colorado counties from "moderate" to "serious." That will force the state to work harder to reduce harmful pollution but also bring tougher and costly regulations for businesses.

Gov. Jared Polis (D) took the unusual step of inviting EPA to downgrade the rating, saying in March that Colorado would no longer ask for an exemption from standards by claiming some of the pollution was drifting into the state from elsewhere ([Greenwire](#), Sept. 9).

He said in August it was time to stop "sugar-coating" Colorado's air problems. The downgrade relates to the area's continuing failure to meet EPA's 2008 ozone standard of 75 parts per billion. On the five-point scale the agency uses to chart compliance with its national ozone limits, "serious" nonattainment ranks midway; the two lower rungs are "severe" and "extreme" nonattainment.

The reclassification requires the state to revise its plan to reduce ozone-forming emissions, which can aggravate asthma and contribute to early deaths from respiratory disease. Ground-level ozone is the main component of smog, and it's created from pollution emitted by vehicles, industries, solvents and other sources.

EPA's decision "means the region's oil and fracked gas polluters are one step closer to finally being required to clean up their dangerous emissions," Robert Ukeiley, a senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity's environmental health program, said in a statement.

Denver and the northern Colorado urban corridor have struggled to meet EPA ozone standards for 15 years. In addition to Denver, counties affected by the change are Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Douglas, Jefferson, Larimer and Weld. — *Associated Press/staff reports*

