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Sent: Tuesday, July 21, 2009 12:10 PM
To: Bill Clary (MIRATECH)
Subject: [BULK] MIRATECH Emissions Monitor - July 2009

Importance: Low

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British Columbia Sets Stricter Particulate Matter Objectives

On 9 April 2009 new ambient air quality criteria were set by the Canadian Province of British Columbia for fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). PM 2.5 refers to particles 2.5 microns or smaller in diameter and includes particles from sources of wood and diesel combustion. "Air quality continues to be a significant issue for Prince George residents. It is important that we continue to set aggressive targets for fine particulate matter, and B.C. will now have some of the most stringent in Canada," said Deputy Premier for Prince George-Mount Robson, Shirley Bond.



The new [criteria and objectives](#), which include 24-hour and annual air quality objectives, will be used to guide air-management decisions on a day-to-day basis. They will also support long-term planning to protect and improve air quality.

British Columbia's new Particulate Matter criteria a British Columbia's new Particulate Matter criteria are:

- A 24-hour objective of 25 micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)
- An annual objective of 8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
- An annual voluntary planning goal of 6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$

The daily objective of 25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ will be used to guide day-to-day air quality management. This includes issuing air quality advisories during periods of poor air quality, initiating open burning restrictions in accordance with the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation and mandatory emission reduction strategies as required under local municipal bylaws.

The new standard will be supported by B.C.'s newly launched [air quality Web site](#) which provides hourly air quality updates and other information about B.C.'s air quality. A guidance document for implementation of the new objectives is also posted and available for download on the new Web site.

Study Finds Risk from Fine Soot Is Twice as High As Previously Thought

On 3 June 2009 the nonprofit [Health Effects Institute](#) (HEI) released an [appraisal](#) of existing studies documenting the links between fine particle soot (PM 2.5) and premature cardiovascular death. The New York Times reports the [study finds](#) mortality rates among people exposed to fine particles are twice as high as previously thought. PM 2.5 refers to particles 2.5 microns or smaller in diameter and includes emissions from diesel engines, coal-fired power plants and oil refineries.



HEI's study found that the risk of having a condition that is a precursor to a deadly heart attack for people living in soot-laden areas increases by 24 percent rather than 12 percent as particle concentrations increase.

In 2006, despite evidence that fine particles were deadlier than first thought, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declined to significantly lower chronic exposure limits. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia declared EPA's decision inadequate in 2007. The Obama administration is now considering what level of PM 2.5 is appropriate.

HEI is a nonprofit corporation chartered in 1980 as an independent research organization to provide high-quality, impartial and relevant science on the effects of air pollution on health. HEI receives half of its core funds from EPA and half from the worldwide motor vehicle industry.

EPA Releases Results of 2002 National Air Toxics Assessment

On 24 June 2009 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released the results of its 2002 national-scale assessment of air toxics emissions. The purpose of the national assessment is to identify and prioritize air toxics, emission source types and locations which are of greatest potential concern in terms of contributing to population risk.



Air toxics - also called Hazardous Air Pollutants (HAPs) - are of concern because they are known to or are suspected of causing cancer and other serious health problems, including birth defects. The report assessed 180 air toxics plus diesel particulate matter from stationary sources of all sizes and from mobile sources such as cars, trucks, buses and construction equipment. The assessment includes four steps that for the year 2002:

1. Compiling a national emissions inventory of air toxics emissions from outdoor sources
2. Estimating ambient concentrations of air toxics across the United States

3. Estimating population exposures across the United States
4. Characterizing potential public health risk due to inhalation of air toxics including both cancer and non-cancer effects

For information summarizing the 2002 assessment, see EPA's [Fact Sheet](#) and [Summary of Results](#) pages. The [Summary of Results](#) page also provides national maps of cancer and non-cancer effects.

President Obama Announces Ocean Protection Plan

On 12 June 2009 President Obama issued a [memorandum](#) creating a task force to begin the process of creating a national policy for U.S. oceans, coasts and Great Lakes. Obama's task force will provide recommendations for the policy and its implementation within the next 90 days and will develop a framework for effective marine spatial planning within 180 days.



The task force will be led by Nancy Sutley, the chair of the [Council on Environmental Quality](#) -- the main environmental policy adviser to the US president -- the memorandum said.

Made up of senior policy-level officials, it will draft several recommendations and draw up a "comprehensive, integrated, ecosystem-based" framework for sustainably using the resources of US oceans, coasts and the Great Lakes.

The United States has the largest ocean area of any country in the world and currently has 140 laws and 20 agencies managing its oceans. President Obama's plan would pull together all the different authorities and laws and focus attention on the problems and challenges facing the oceans and those who manage them.

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