

EPA replacing Bush smog limit with stricter rule



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Smog is formed when emissions from cars, power plants and other factories mix in sunlight.

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Published: January 7, 2010

Updated: January 7, 2010

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WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed stricter health standards for smog, replacing a Bush-era limit that ran counter to scientific recommendations.

The new limits — which are presented as a range — will likely put hundreds more counties nationwide in violation, a designation that will require them to find additional ways to clamp down on pollution or face government sanctions, most likely the loss of federal highway dollars.

The tighter standards will cost tens of billions of dollars to implement, but will ultimately save billions in avoided emergency room visits, premature deaths, and missed work and school days, the EPA said.

The proposed range was what scientists had recommended during the Bush administration. However, former President George W. Bush personally intervened and set the standard above what was advised after protests from electric utilities and other industries.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said in a statement Thursday that science, this time around, had been followed.

“EPA is stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face,” Jackson said. “Using the best science to strengthen these standards is long overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier.”

The Obama administration earlier this year had indicated it planned to scrap the Bush smog limits.

Smog is a respiratory irritant that has been linked to asthma attacks and other respiratory illnesses. It is formed when emissions from cars, power plants and other factories mix in sunlight.

While smog has been a long-term problem in parts of Texas, California, and along the northeast Coast, the new standards could affect counties in Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, the Dakotas, Kansas, Minnesota and Iowa for the first time based on EPA data.