

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MDEQ OBJECTS TO EPA'S INCLUSION OF DESOTO COUNTY IN MEMPHIS OZONE NONATTAINMENT AREA

(JACKSON, Miss.) -- The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) objects to today's announcement by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to include part of DeSoto County in the Memphis ozone nonattainment area. The EPA announced a proposal to include the urban areas of DeSoto County, Mississippi, and Crittenden County, Arkansas, in the Memphis ozone nonattainment area.

"This is a most unfortunate decision by the current administration, and a failure to take a responsible approach to environmental protection. EPA's decision is not a required federal mandate and is contrary to the data we submitted to them.

"There are no industries in DeSoto County with major air emissions. We are also seeing improved air quality through EPA's own mandates for improved fuel standards, fuel efficiency, and better technology for new vehicles. So this becomes a costly paperwork exercise of taxpayer money with no air quality benefit.

"DeSoto County, and all of Mississippi, is in attainment with the current ozone standard of 75 parts per billion, and to group DeSoto County with an area not in attainment is arbitrary. Due to the hard work of DeSoto County's leadership and citizens the air quality has improved. We will use every resource to confront and defeat this proposal," said Trudy D. Fisher, MDEQ Executive Director.

MDEQ's objections to EPA's move include:

- DeSoto County (Mississippi) and Shelby County (Tennessee) are in attainment for air quality

standards based on this year' s data. Crittendon County (Arkansas) in not in attainment according to this year' s data but is according to last year' s data.

● There is no good reason to designate DeSoto County as nonattainment and no benefit to Arkansas or Memphis for doing so.

● At a time when both federal and state resources are dwindling and stressed, it is poor judgment to put more demands on those limited resources when the decision will not improve public health. This action will drain resources of three states and two EPA regions with more paperwork, more staff time, and more meetings--all for little or no benefit.

● The public is better served by devoting time and resources to public outreach and education about air quality that engage citizens in taking effective action rather than chase endless and likely meaningless regulatory requirements.