

## PINAL COUNTY LIFESTYLE – JULY 2009

[Pinal County Air Quality: Managing a Shared Resource == suggested headline]

Gentle Reader, this month's column is all about air quality and dust – as in PM<sub>10</sub> – in Pinal County. The subject's not very glamorous but one that has been “simmering” for some time and is now an issue that's come to the forefront of our County's attention. Allow me to set the stage.

Our actions, even actions on private property, can impact resources that we all share. Formally or informally, we need to somehow manage those shared resources to maintain order, protect public safety and protect public health. For example, on our highways we set speed limits to protect public safety. Our lakes, rivers and aquifers historically carried off discharges, but also provided drinking water for citizens. So we set water quality standards to protect public health.

Similarly, we all breathe the same air, so we've established air quality standards. In 1970, Congress adopted a Clean Air Act that required the EPA to set air quality standards that would protect public health and protect against nuisance impacts. Areas that meet the standards receive an "attainment" designation. Areas that fail receive a "nonattainment" designation, which triggers a requirement to reduce emissions in order to regain attainment. Currently, two air pollutants raise concerns in western Pinal County: ozone and dust. The Casa Grande area still complies with the ozone standard, but with only a small margin of safety.

For dust, or PM<sub>10</sub>, Pinal County faces a real challenge. PM<sub>10</sub> consists of airborne particles with a diameter of 10 microns or less. Particles in the PM<sub>10</sub> size range can reach the inner recesses of the human lung, which raises obvious health concerns. Prior discussions indicate that the young, the old and those with respiratory problems bear the highest risk. The EPA adopted the PM<sub>10</sub> standard in 1987. The human eye can readily see PM<sub>10</sub>, so we all have a pretty good idea where those dust and dirt emissions come from. Over the last 40 years, Pinal County developed an air monitoring network that now includes 13 sites spread across the county. As monitoring technology improved and the network expanded, several monitors began regularly reporting a failure to meet the 1987 standard.

In November of 2008 – as part of an Air Quality summit convened by Pinal County – the EPA announced its intent to re-designate at least part of Pinal County as "nonattainment" for PM<sub>10</sub>. This formal action by the EPA would trigger a process under the Clean Air Act and would require Pinal County, acting in concert with ADEQ, cities, business, industry and agriculture, to develop a legally-enforceable plan to reduce emissions to a level that meets the PM<sub>10</sub> standard.

Discussion of controlling dust in Arizona frequently triggers the comment that "it's the desert, so we shouldn't have to meet the same dust standard." Such an argument overlooks the fact that the PM<sub>10</sub> standard protects public health. In addition, the EPA's standard constitutes a national standard that doesn't allow for local exemptions. Another frequently heard comment is: "we can't control the wind." The EPA has rules in place that allow for ignoring high pollution levels associated with unusual wind events. But our local data shows that PM<sub>10</sub> levels include violations under low-wind or even dead-calm conditions. Wind isn't entirely the issue.

Despite last fall's announcement, EPA still hasn't formally started the 9-month process that would result in the setting of boundaries within which PM<sub>10</sub> would need to be controlled. Once a designation occurs, Pinal County, acting in conjunction with ADEQ and stakeholders, will have 18 months to submit a plan to the EPA that characterizes the local sources of PM<sub>10</sub> and outlines emission reductions required to meet the standard.

Anticipating EPA action, the County's Air Quality, Public Works, and Geographic Information Services Departments, along with ADEQ, continue to work on an inventory of local PM<sub>10</sub> sources. That effort includes focus on roads, agriculture, construction and other sources. To some extent each of us directly or indirectly contributes emissions of various air pollutants. We rely on vehicles, power plants, roads, farming and ranching, all of which generate emissions. Additional information regarding local air quality, including local air quality data, projections of anticipated PM<sub>10</sub> and ozone levels, and updates on regulatory developments, can be found on the County's website at [www.pinalcountyz.gov](http://www.pinalcountyz.gov).

As your Supervisor, I am committed to working with our stakeholders as we focus on focusing the area of at-risk concern and pulling together mitigation measures that protect our citizens and the future of Pinal County. And before I close: HAPPY BIRTHDAY, USA!

***David Snider***

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