

EPA Announces Schedule for Action on Regional Haze SIPs

NOVEMBER 9, 2011

On November 9, 2011, EPA announced a schedule for taking action on 45 regional haze state implementation plans (SIPs). The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ordered this schedule in a consent decree which resolved a suit filed by National Parks Conservation Association and other environmental groups in August 2011. EPA initially issued a rule requiring states to submit regional haze plans in 1999, with the plans being due by late 2007. In August 2011, environmental groups filed suit against the agency to prompt action on these plans.

The state pollution plans that are the subject of the consent decree are aimed at protecting national parks and wilderness areas, including the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone, from the damaging effects of regional haze. These plans are intended to limit haze-forming pollution such as nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and fine particulate matter. Nearly all states have submitted SIPs, and EPA will work closely with states to approve their plans by the court-appointed deadline.

The regional haze program requires a reduction of harmful emissions from industrial facilities which are 35 to 50 years old. Regional haze plans involve cost-effective, widely available pollution control methods for any emissions from those facilities which are found to cause haze at national parks or wilderness areas.

Under the consent decree, EPA is required to take action on all SIPs by late 2012. EPA will accept public comment on its proposed schedule for 30 days following publication of a notice in the Federal Register.

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