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# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet

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## Transportation and Air Quality Planning *Federal Laws Provide Tools for Change*

### **Working Together to Clean the Air**

For the past four decades, federal transportation funding policies have focused on highway building and maintenance. These policies reinforce an automobile-dependent lifestyle and provide less support for other means of transportation such as transit, bicycling and walking. Although cars are manufactured to pollute less today than in the past, the rise in the number of cars on the road and their frequency of use has resulted in increased vehicle-related air pollution.

Challenged by the need to provide both mobility and clean air to people, Congress passed the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA) and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). ISTEA has undergone several revisions and reauthorizations over the years, the most recent passed by Congress in 2012 as the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (MAP-21). These laws require transportation planning to be conducted in a way that protects air quality and allows for a consultative process among state air quality and transportation agencies, as well as local planning commissions.

### **The Clean Air Act Amendments: Increased Attention to Mobile Source Emissions**

Mobile sources (cars, buses and trucks) generate four major pollutants: hydrocarbons, or volatile organic compounds (VOCs), nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO) and particulate matter (PM). VOCs react with NOx in the presence of sunlight and elevated temperatures to form ground-level ozone, a major component of smog which is one of the most serious air pollution problems in New Hampshire. Because portions of Hillsborough, Merrimack, Rockingham and Strafford counties failed to meet national EPA ozone standards, New Hampshire developed a State Implementation Plan (SIP) detailing actions the State would take to reduce VOC, NOx, CO and PM emissions from all sources.

With transportation accounting for over half of some these air pollutants, efforts to reduce pollution from the mobile source sector factor heavily in the SIP. Some of the SIP programs implemented in New Hampshire to reduce motor vehicle emissions include:

1. The annual motor vehicle anti-tampering inspection program for pre-1996 vehicles that checks for working emission control components.
2. The on-board diagnostics inspections test that check vehicles' on-board computers to confirm proper operation of emission control equipment.
3. A gasoline vapor recovery program to reduce evaporative emissions from vehicle fueling.
4. A federal reformulated gasoline program for summer fuel in the four county area.

## **Transportation Conformity**

Perhaps the most important and far-reaching provision of the CAAA is the “transportation conformity” requirement. To ensure that state transportation and highway activities do not interfere with a state’s efforts to achieve attainment with air quality standards, all federally funded or federally approved transportation plans and projects must be able to demonstrate that they “conform” to requirements of the SIP. Failure to show that transportation projects conform to the SIP can result in the loss of federal funding. Officials at NHDES regularly consult with officials at the NH Department of Transportation (DOT), the Federal Highway Administration, EPA, and the regional planning agencies to ensure that transportation planning and the SIP work together toward common goals of mobility and environmental quality.

In addition to transportation conformity, the CAAA requires that all other (non-transportation) federally supported programs and projects conform to the state’s implementation plan. This requirement is known as "general" conformity.

## **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program**

While the CAAA prescribes goals and procedures for achieving air quality standards, MAP-21 provides greater flexibility for funding transportation emissions reductions programs. One such MAP-21 funded program is the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program (CMAQ), created specifically for projects that improve air quality in nonattainment and former nonattainment areas. CMAQ funds are awarded competitively in New Hampshire and are used for transportation projects that reduce congestion and improve air quality. Examples of NH CMAQ projects include public transit, RideShare programs, Park & Ride lots, idling reduction efforts and traffic signal coordination.

## **What Can You Do to Help Reduce Air Pollution Caused By Cars?**

According to the EPA, of all our daily activities, driving a car is probably the single most polluting thing the we do. Every driver can make a significant contributions to reducing motor vehicle emissions by making the most of traveling options, such as:

- Carpooling, using public transportation, combining trips, biking and walking.
- Eliminating unnecessary idling.
- Keeping speeds to 65 mph or lower.
- Avoiding aggressive driving habits, such as jack rabbit starts and stops.
- Properly maintaining vehicles and keeping tires inflated to their recommended pressure.
- Buying the most efficient vehicle available that meets one’s needs.
- Using cleaner burning alternative fuels or advanced technologies such as natural gas, propane, electric or hybrid vehicles.

For more information about air pollution issues, please contact the NHDES Air Resources Division, on-line at [www.des.nh.gov](http://www.des.nh.gov) or call (603) 271-1370.