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## Summer will be test for upcoming EPA ozone standard

by Elizabeth Dunbar, Minnesota Public Radio

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St. Paul, Minn. — Air quality regulators will be watching to see how many alerts Minnesota issues this summer because of high ozone levels.

Ozone, the summertime pollutant that forms when sunlight mixes with emissions and fumes from vehicles and industry, faces new scrutiny from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA plans to implement stricter standards for ozone late this summer.

Minnesota has so far been in compliance for ozone, but some areas of the state -- including the Twin Cities -- have come close or exceeded the range of standards the EPA is considering.

Doug Aburano, who works in air quality compliance for the EPA in the Midwest region, said Thursday that the new standard will be announced Aug. 31. It will be somewhere between 60 and 70 parts per billionth.

"This summer is going to be very crucial for Minnesota," Aburano told a group of environmentalists, policymakers and industry representatives gathered at an event hosted by the Minnesota Environmental Initiative. "If it's 70, you guys look pretty good. If it's 65, you're right on the bubble."

Aburano said ozone levels from summer 2010 will factor into the three-year average used to determine whether states are meeting the standard.

If they don't, changes would have to be made as soon as 2011. The regulation could affect whether a new power plant could be built or whether a factory or power plant could expand.

The EPA will also soon implement stricter standards for particulate pollution, which comes from smoke and other emissions.

Eventually, the new air standards could lead to more alerts -- even if the air quality is getting better, said Frank Kohlasch, an analyst with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

"As they lower the standard, if we get lucky and we remain in attainment with some of these standards, we still may be seeing more air quality index alerts just because they're bringing the standards down and they're changing the thresholds," he said.

A hot, dry summer could lead to more days on which the MPCA issues an alert to warn people about the respiratory problems associated with ozone.

Minnesota officials should know by the end of the summer if the EPA will require action to lower ozone levels in the state.

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