

Recommendation #15: EPA, states, local agencies and tribes should develop a menu of options for effective communication to build support with a wide variety of constituencies for clean air plans at the local and state level.

Background/Explanation: A recent National Academy of Sciences report concluded that the SIP process is overly bureaucratic, drawing attention and resources away from the relevant issues of tracking progress and assessing performance. Both state officials and the regulated community complain that the planning process is cumbersome, lengthy and difficult for the public to comprehend, which encumbers the goal of developing and adopting air quality control plans, and attaining and maintaining national ambient air standards.

Recommended Actions Elements of these plans are frequently the subject of public lawsuits. Yet successfully engaging the public early in the SIP development process builds general understanding and support. Although some states and local air agencies achieve this through their current outreach programs, some do not. These discussions are timely as states prepare to develop SIPs for new federal ambient air quality standards for 8-hour ozone and fine particulate matter.

A more aggressive marketing approach can help educate the public about the need to clean up local air pollution; getting the public involved in the SIP process is much more difficult. Often air agencies only hear from those members of the public who have 1) time and resources to send representatives to meetings or 2) financial interests at stake, which make the expense of time and resources worthwhile. Even the vocal environmental community often cannot participate fully due to limited staff and financial resources.

Influencing community opinion leaders is a tested means of shaping public opinion, particularly in the short-term. However, all too often state and federal agencies do not use these techniques because of staff and resource limitations or department policies which constrain outreach. Although transmitting a message to the people who help shape public opinion is critical, merely sending press releases or letters of invitation to a community meetings is not effective. States and local air agencies must engage them directly.

Building support for newer pollutant programs requires public education about the direct health risks associated with ozone and PM Fine. Effective outreach is most often achieved at the local level, where communities can relate to specifics and risks that may effect them and motivate behavioral change. Some methods to collaborate with states and engage the public locally could include the following actions:

- Target key opinion leaders. States and local air offices should initiate or expand the use of editorial board meetings to reach key media opinion leaders.
- States and locals should develop relationships with local reporters covering the issue.
- All states and locals should be sure that the Air Quality Index is forecast and reported in weather reports in their communities.

- States and locals should meet with local leaders in the Chambers of Commerce in their areas.
- States and locals should make presentations to key civic groups in the community.
- States and locals should meet with leaders in the religious community and work with them to reach out to their membership.
- States and locals should meet with leaders in neighborhood associations and work with them to reach out to their membership.
- States and locals should meet with local and state environmental and public health groups to enlist their involvement in the process and their partnership in outreach efforts.
- States and locals should meet with key elected officials early and often in the process to keep them and their key staff informed.
- EPA should host focus group meetings to identify messages that build support for these issues.
- EPA should develop outreach materials targeted to diverse communities that explain the SIP process and the health effects of air pollution.
- EPA should offer training on efficient web content development for local government sites, incorporating AIR NOW real-time ozone and PM projections.
- STAPPA/ALAPCO and EPA should identify and catalog existing resources and develop additional appropriate tools based on targeted audiences.
- EPA should schedule state public meetings/workshops during SIP/rule development.
- STAPPA/ALAPCO and EPA should identify additional financial and staff resources to help agencies develop, produce and disseminate appropriate tools that reach targeted audiences, with the goal of garnering public support for the SIP process.

Feasibility: It is likely that these recommendations will be implemented if expertise between federal, state and local agencies are shared. The STAPPA/ALAPCO Public Education and Communications Committee may be an appropriate group to coordinate this effort. EPA's role can include development and dissemination of outreach materials that are nationally applicable, as well as improving how information may be made available on its website.

Timing: As SIP development progresses, public involvement should be actively encouraged throughout the process.

Resources: Redirection of existing effort and personnel; additional resources should be considered as outreach planning intensifies.

Priority Level: High

Supporting Materials: The Atlanta Regional Commission is in the process of creating a new awards program, designed specifically to recognize local governments for their efforts to create strong, healthy communities in the Atlanta region. The program will focus on five categories: community involvement/community building; regional prosperity; education; air quality and transportation; and, environmental sustainability.