



Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

October 14, 2022

Summary of exceptional event demonstration for particulate matter on December 23, 2020 in El Paso County.

Particulate Matter Background

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets health-based standards for the amount of very small particles, also known as particulate matter, allowed in the air. The particulate matter of concern is either 10 micrometers and smaller (PM_{10}) or 2.5 micrometers and smaller ($PM_{2.5}$), both smaller than the width of a human hair. Breathing air with high levels of particulate matter can cause health problems. When the air in an area has high particulate matter pollution, state and local officials must take certain actions, including possibly creating new rules to reduce emissions.

High Winds Caused Elevation of PM_{10}

Exceptional events are unusual or naturally occurring events that affect air quality and are not reasonably controllable or preventable. States can request the EPA not consider air quality data affected by an exceptional event from determining if an area met an air quality health standard. On December 23, 2020, high winds caused blowing dust in and around El Paso County. Due to these high winds, the PM_{10} levels at the Socorro Hueco and El Paso Mimosa monitors in El Paso County on December 23, 2020, were not reasonably controllable or preventable. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality plans to submit an exceptional event demonstration to the EPA to exclude these data.

Analyses to Support the Demonstration

Analyses of data related to the proposed exceptional event on December 23, 2020, show that the measured PM_{10} concentrations:

- were not reasonably controllable or preventable;
- were associated with a natural event due to dust from the United States and Mexico being blown into El Paso County by high winds; and
- were in excess of normal historical fluctuations.

EPA Decides Whether Standards Were Met

If the demonstration is approved by the EPA, the PM_{10} concentrations recorded at the Socorro Hueco and El Paso Mimosa monitors on December 23, 2020, would not be considered when the EPA determines whether or not El Paso met the PM_{10} health-based standard.