Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
April 9, 2025

Summary of 2022 El Paso and Laredo Exceptional Event Demonstration for Particulate Matter

Background on Particulate Matter

The U.S. 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.

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 that EPA not consider air quality data affected by an exceptional event when determining if an area met an air quality health standard. High winds caused blowing dust on February 16, 2022, in El Paso County and on March 18, 2022, in Laredo County. Due to the high winds, the levels of PM_{10} at monitors within these areas were not reasonably controllable or preventable. TCEQ plans to submit an exceptional event demonstration to EPA to exclude these data from consideration when EPA determines compliance with the particulate matter standards.

Analyses to Support the Demonstration

Analyses of data related to the proposed exceptional events from 2022 show that the measured PM_{10} concentrations:

- were not reasonably controllable or preventable,
- were associated with natural events due to dust blown into the affected counties, and
- exceeded normal historical fluctuations.

EPA Decides Whether Standards Were Met

If the demonstration for 2022 is approved by EPA, the PM_{10} concentrations exceeding the National Ambient Air Quality Standard on the referenced dates would not be considered when EPA determines whether the affected counties met the PM_{10} health-based standard.