

Chair Earl L. “Buddy” Carter
**Opening Statement – Subcommittee on Environment,
Manufacturing, and Critical Materials:**
**“Safeguarding American Prosperity and People’s Livelihoods:
Legislation to Modernize Air Quality Standards”**
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As prepared for delivery

Let me welcome the witnesses to this hearing on legislation to update the process under the Clean Air Act for setting and implementing National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

The Clean Air Act requires the promulgation of NAAQS for six criteria air pollutants: sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, and lead.

Under the current structure of the statute, EPA is required to review periodically the scientific data upon which the NAAQS are based and revise the standards if necessary to maintain an adequate margin of safety that is requisite to protect public health.

Today, we will hear testimony and receive feedback on the Air Quality Standards Implementation Act of 2024.

This discussion draft would update how the standards are reviewed and implemented and provide more clarity in the law to enable better control of harmful emissions like wildfire smoke.

This hearing is of the utmost importance to many districts across the country.

Southeast Georgia – where I’m from – is poised for a manufacturing boom. Our favorable climate, access to ports, low electricity rates, and welcoming business environment have made it one of the best places to invest in the country.

We are growing quickly.

Billion-dollar manufacturing investments have been made and further opportunities are quickly presenting themselves.

In addition to these developing areas, we have legacy industries that are the backbone of our economy. Georgia is the number one forestry state in the country and according to the Georgia Forestry Commission, the industry provided over \$1.5 billion in economic output to my district in 2022.

These sectors are looking to grow, and while they grow, they are seeking to do it with the highest environmental standards in the world.

However, actions like the Biden Administration's recently finalized annual PM_{2.5} standard threaten to slam the brakes on these investments and economic drivers.

One of the main concerns is that, because of the success of the Clean Air Act already, new standards are getting closer and closer to background levels.

Because of this, even areas that meet the standard will not have enough room or "headspace" to allow for permitting new or expanded construction.

This recent action by the EPA is counterproductive to our goals of onshoring supply chains and boosting American manufacturing.

According to a report conducted by Oxford Economics, the EPA's recently finalized PM_{2.5} standards will threaten up to \$197.4 billion of economic activity and put nearly one million jobs at risk.

We'll hear today about analysis of permitting from three dozen different industries, including pharmaceuticals, paper and wood, and electric vehicle batteries. The analysis shows that the recently finalized PM_{2.5} standard would result in the failure to permit nearly 80 percent of those projects.

And these are industries that already control emissions to the highest standards. We learned in a hearing last fall that most of the PM_{2.5} emission do not even come from these sources.

After 40 years, something is not working with our system to set and enforce standards. The Clean Air Act was not established to kill American productivity and prosperity; it was established to enhance our success.

We must make practical reforms to ensure the NAAQS process works in a way that makes sense. It should reflect the experience of 40 years of implementing air quality standards.

The discussion draft reflects some of this experience. Among other measures, it would provide more time to develop new standards while providing time for EPA and the states to focus on implementing standards.

It ensures that State air pollution agencies responsible for, and expert in, implementing the standards have a larger voice in the process.

It would make clear that wildfire and other exceptional events can be reliably excluded from compliance data. And it would make it easier to reduce wildfires and lower harmful pollution levels.

I invite constructive comments from the panelists both on PM_{2.5} implementation challenges, and what those indicate about the current process, and how reforms may address those challenges.

I should note that we sought to have EPA testify today, but EPA declined to attend at this point. We will continue to work with the agency, including examining the comments it supplied on our bill.

We will also continue to work to get this right. America has the best environmental standards and wonderful economic potential. We will work to make sure this remains the case going forward.