Summary of the Clean Air Act

42 U.S.C. §7401 et seq. (1970)

The Clean Air Act (CAA) is the comprehensive federal law that regulates air emissions from stationary and mobile sources. Among other things, this law authorizes EPA to establish National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to protect public health and public welfare and to regulate emissions of hazardous air pollutants.

Quick Links

- The official text of the CAA is available in the *United States Code* <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/uscode>, from the US Government Printing Office

NAAQS and SIPs

One of the goals of the Act was to set and achieve NAAQS in every state by 1975 in order to address the public health and welfare risks posed by certain widespread air pollutants. The setting of these pollutant standards was coupled with directing the states to develop state implementation plans (SIPs), applicable to appropriate industrial sources in the state, in order to achieve these standards. The Act was amended in 1977 and 1990 primarily to set new goals (dates) for achieving attainment of NAAQS since many areas of the country had failed to meet the deadlines.

Sources of Pollution

Section 112 of the Clean Air Act addresses emissions of hazardous air pollutants. Prior to 1990, CAA established a risk-based program under which only a few standards were developed. The 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments revised Section 112 to first require

issuance of technology-based standards for major sources and certain area sources. "Major sources" are defined as a stationary source or group of stationary sources that emit or have the potential to emit 10 tons per year or more of a hazardous air pollutant or 25 tons per year or more of a combination of hazardous air pollutants. An "area source" is any stationary source that is not a major source.

For major sources, Section 112 requires that EPA establish emission standards that require the maximum degree of reduction in emissions of hazardous air pollutants. These emission standards are commonly referred to as "maximum achievable control technology" or "MACT" standards. Eight years after the technology-based MACT standards are issued for a source category, EPA is required to review those standards to determine whether any residual risk exists for that source category and, if necessary, revise the standards to address such risk.

Compliance and Enforcement

- Air Enforcement <https://epa.gov/enforcement/air-enforcement>
- Clean Air Act Compliance Monitoring <https://epa.gov/compliance/clean-air-act-caa-compliance-monitoring>: investigations and inspections

History of the Act

- EPA History: Clean Air Act of 1970/1977 <https://epa.gov/history/epa-history-clean-air-act-19701977>
- EPA History: Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 <https://epa.gov/history/epa-history-clean-air-act-amendments-1990>

More Information

The Office of Air and Radiation (OAR) <https://epa.gov/aboutepa/about-office-air-and-radiation> develops national programs, policies, and regulations for controlling air pollution and radiation exposure.

- Clean Air Act and Air Pollution Overview <https://epa.gov/clean-air-act-overview> covers progress under CAA in reducing air pollution, and the roles of state government and other parties in implementation.

- Air Regulatory Topics <https://epa.gov/regulatory-information-topic/regulatory-information-topic-air>
- Broad index of Air Topics <https://epa.gov/environmental-topics/air-topics>

Under CAA Section 112(r), the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) <https://epa.gov/aboutepa/about-office-land-and-emergency-management#oem> administers the Risk Management Plan Rule <https://epa.gov/rmp>.

Last updated on July 31, 2024