

The Air Quality Management System Q & As

1. What are the key features of the Air Quality Management System?

- 1) The System is comprehensive: it looks at all major sources of air pollution that contribute to air quality problems and supports actions that will address these sources.
- 2) The System is collaborative; it provides a framework for provincial, territorial and federal governments to work together to find the best way to improve air quality.
- 3) The System is inclusive: stakeholders and communities have an important role in finding the best ways to improve air quality.
- 4) The System is proactive: it focuses on effective actions that will reduce pollution levels overall and on keeping clean areas clean.
- 5) The System is flexible: it recognizes the important differences among Canadian jurisdictions and allows for tailored responses to air quality problems.
- 6) The System is accountable: it provides Canadians with information about the state of the air that they are breathing and about the actions underway to protect and improve outdoor air quality.
- 7) The System helps us internationally: it allows Canada to continue to demonstrate active management of air quality, strengthening our negotiating position with the US to expand the Canada/US Air Quality Agreement.

2. What are the major parts of the System and how do they work together?

The System has five major parts: 1) air quality standards to “set the bar” for air quality management across the country, 2) a framework for air zone management that supports actions to improve air quality and keep clean areas clean, 3) industrial emission requirements that set a consistent level of performance for all major industries across the country, 4) a mechanism to coordinate action when air pollution crosses a border – either inter-provincial or international and 5) a cross-country inter-governmental forum to collaborate on action to address emissions from the transportation sector

Because of the range of air quality challenges across the country, all of these parts are important to the success of the System. The air quality standards drive air quality improvement and the other components are, taken together, the means by which the improvements will be achieved.

The System’s success also relies on collaboration among governments and engagement of stakeholders and communities. Governments will collaborate on the development of the outdoor air quality and industrial emission requirements. And, while provinces and territories will manage activities at the level of air zones, the federal government will collaborate on transportation sources and lead actions addressing international cross-border air pollution.

Finally, the accountability of the System will be supported by monitoring and reporting of outdoor air quality conditions and emissions from major industrial sources.

3. What are outdoor air quality standards and how do they work?

Standards for air quality are measurements of the concentrations of pollutants in outdoor air. The System's initial air quality standards are for two pollutants of concern to human health: fine particulate and ozone. Smog is largely comprised of these two substances. The System will develop standards for other pollutants over time.

The System's standards for these substances build on the Canada-wide Standards for Particulate Matter and Ozone developed by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment in 2000. The new standards are more stringent than the Canada-wide Standards.

The new standards set the bar for action on air quality. Jurisdictions will monitor the concentrations of fine particulate and decide what actions need to be taken to either improve poor air quality or maintain good air quality.

The air quality standards will not be enforceable. However, they will be incorporated as objectives under sections 54 and 55 of the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*. Provinces may also incorporate them into their regulatory regimes if they choose.

4. What is the relationship between the outdoor air quality standards and the industrial emission requirements?

The air standards deal with the quality of the air outdoors that people breathe. The industrial emission requirements deal with the emissions created by industrial activity.

The System operates on the principle that industries are one of a number of influences on outdoor air quality. In many parts of Canada other sources such as transportation can influence air quality even more than industrial sources.

The System's industrial pollution requirements are set to achieve a "good base level" of performance across the country. They are not designed, on their own, to address all air quality concerns or to achieve, on their own, the air quality standards. Rather, they work in concert with other actions to achieve the air quality standards. Where needed for better air quality jurisdictions can also impose stricter requirements on industry.

5. What are Air Zones and Airsheds?

Canada is a big country and air moves over it in six large "airsheds" that extend across provincial/territorial and even international borders. The System has identified these airsheds to help affected jurisdictions coordinate their actions.

Air zones are smaller areas created within provinces and territories to help manage air quality. Jurisdictions will monitor air quality within these zones and, depending on conditions and major sources, manage air quality to ensure that poor air quality improves and good air quality stays good. Air zone management is supplemented by collaboration at the regional airshed level on transboundary air pollution.

The System recognizes that air pollutants may cross a provincial/territorial border. Because the authority to act to reduce pollution resides within provincial/territorial borders, there needs to be a mechanism – airshed coordination – in place to support action between governments to address

cross-border air pollution problems. All affected governments will be involved in coordinating action to address cross-border pollution. When the border at issue is the Canada-United States border, the Canadian federal government will lead the effort.

6. What is air zone management? Who is responsible for it?

The provinces and territories are responsible for air zone management, and will delineate their air zones and manage their air quality as conditions require.

The System provides for considerable flexibility in air zone management to accommodate the range and variety of air quality challenges in Canada. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment has developed guidance documents regarding the delineation and management of air zones and a guidance document that can help governments to determine if they are exceeding the PM_{2.5} and ozone standards.

7. What are Canada-wide requirements for industrial emissions?

In Canada currently, actions to manage industrial emissions vary from province to province, creating a patchwork and an uneven playing field for Canadian enterprises. The System will establish consistent industrial emission requirements to level the playing field. Major industrial facilities will have a good base level of air emission performance regardless of the air quality where they are located.

Canadian industrial emission requirements and the actions governments will take under the System will allow Canada to continue to demonstrate to the United States that we are actively managing our air quality, and so be in a strong position to engage the United States.

The System's industrial pollution requirements are set to achieve a "good base level" of performance across the country. For some industrial sources, provincial standards are already as good as or better than this base level of performance. The requirements aim to ensure that this good performance is achieved across Canada and in some cases the requirement may be more stringent than what is currently applied in some provinces. As part of their air management, provinces and territories can choose to impose stricter requirements on industry. The System also operates on the principle that the industrial requirements can be reviewed and made more stringent over time.

8. Will the System help with pollution coming from the US?

Many parts of Canada, such as the lower Fraser Valley in British Columbia and much of southern Ontario, receive air pollution from the United States.

All of the success Canada has seen to date in negotiations with the United States about stemming this cross-border air pollution has relied on an effective demonstration of strong measures in Canada to control air pollution that may flow into the United States.

The System's standards and requirements, and the actions governments will take under the System to implement them, will allow Canada to continue to demonstrate to the United States that we are actively managing our air quality, and be in a stronger position to work with the US to expand the Canada/US Air Quality Agreement.

9. Where do transportation emissions fit in the System?

Cars, trucks, boats, construction equipment and even lawn mowers all fall into the category of transportation – or mobile – sources. In many parts of Canada, these sources are by far the leading contributors to air pollution.

The federal government has over the past decade made great progress in reducing the amount of harmful pollutants from mobile sources. Provinces and territories have also made important contributions in areas such as vehicle inspection and public transportation. However, congestion and the sheer volume of traffic along major roads and highways can create air quality problems in places where there are also lots of people.

Actions taken in individual air zones will help to address these sources. However, the System recognizes that issues around mobile sources are common across air zones. To help deal with the broader issues, representatives from Canadian provinces and territories and the federal government, representing transportation, environment and other sectors have created a cross-Canada working group on mobile sources. The working group will share information and look for opportunities for collaboration on key initiatives intended to reduce air pollution. The work of the group will support actions at the air zone level to address emissions from transportation.

10. What was the role of stakeholders in the development of the System?

From the earliest days of the System's development - when the federal government convened a multi-stakeholder meeting in early 2008 – representatives of industrial, health and environment organizations have contributed their time, expertise and perspectives to the development of the System and its major elements. The industrial emission requirements and the outdoor air quality standards have been developed through an innovative multi-stakeholder, intergovernmental collaborative process that involved over 400 individuals in 17 technical expert groups.

11. Does the System replace existing air management policies and regulation?

The System builds on existing initiatives to improve the management of air quality in Canada. Some jurisdictions are already active in improving the air quality and keeping clean areas clean. The System offers additional tools to governments that they can use to enhance air management.

Policies and regulations already in place in jurisdictions will continue to apply and jurisdictions will decide whether they need to be modified or not.

12. How important is intergovernmental collaboration to the System?

The System will build and sustain a framework that is both strong and flexible so Canadian governments may effectively respond to many different air quality challenges across the country. Even though there are important individual government roles, a comprehensive system of this nature can only be successfully developed and implemented with strong collaboration among the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The System fundamentally recognizes the value of consistent standards and requirements implemented by provinces and territories across Canada. Governments need to collaborate in order to achieve these objectives of the System and make the best use of available government resources to protect the environment.