



Group pushes 'dirty air' status

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JACKSON (AP) -- A citizen coalition in Sublette County has petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to designate the county as a "dirty air" area following several ozone warnings this winter.

Such a designation would require increased safeguards for clean air.

"Like western Wyoming's smog, this petition is unprecedented," said Jeremy Nichols, director of Rocky Mountain Clean Air Action. "We need to clean up this mess to safeguard public health; this petition is the first step, and it's a big one."

Monitors showed that Sublette County exceeded federal standards for ozone air pollution repeatedly this winter. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality has said gas can harm children, seniors, those with asthma and other respiratory conditions.

State DEQ officials attribute increased ozone levels to oil and gas development from the Pinedale Anticline and the Jonah Field.

"We're dealing with unhealthy air pollution that can permanently damage the lungs of children, young athletes, those with respiratory problems, and others who seek to enjoy outdoor recreation," said Dr. Michael Kramer, an emergency physician and resident of Pinedale. "This isn't Denver or Los Angeles, but we need the same protection."

Federal regulations limit ozone air pollution to no more than 75 parts per billion during an eight-hour period. Ozone levels near the town of Boulder, in rural Sublette County, climbed to 122 parts per billion earlier this year -- a level higher than most urban areas.

The federal government may declare areas where air quality fails to meet standards as a "dirty air" area, officially called a "nonattainment" area. The federal Clean Air Act specifies that nonattainment areas are subject to stronger clean-air safeguards and requires states to develop cleanup plans.