

## The Primary National Ambient Air Quality Standards must protect public health.

The Clean Air Act requires the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set national limits called National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for criteria air pollutants that determine outdoor air quality.

EPA sets NAAQS for six criteria pollutants that seriously impact human health:

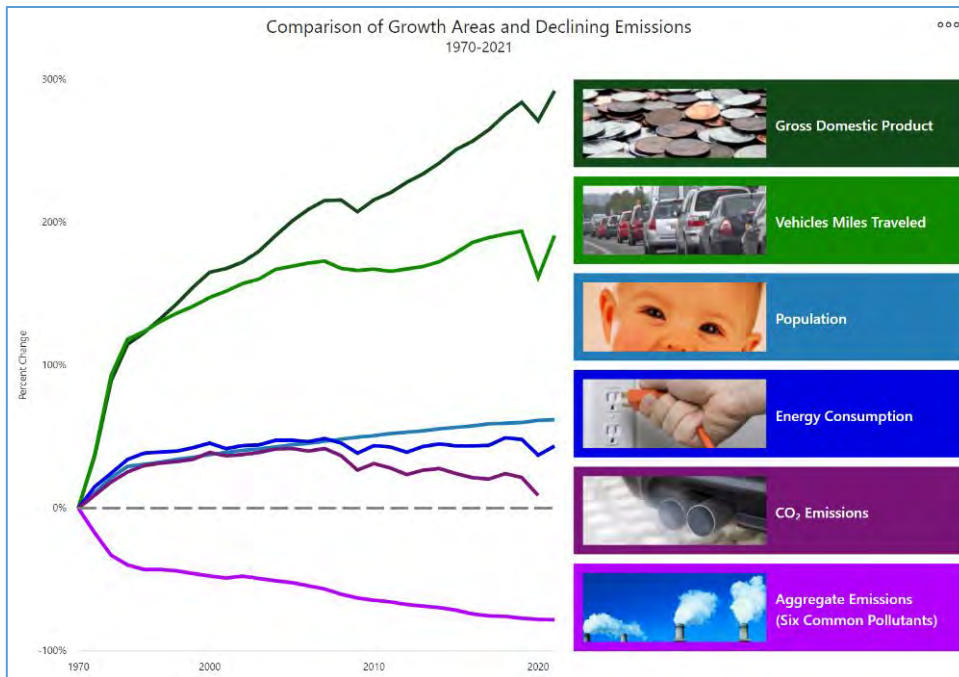
- Ozone
- Particulate matter
- Nitrogen oxides
- Sulfur dioxide
- Carbon monoxide
- Lead



Under the Act, EPA must set the primary NAAQS for each pollutant at the level required to protect public health with an adequate margin of safety. This is the sole criterion that EPA can consider when setting a primary air quality standard, as affirmed by a unanimous [Supreme Court decision in 2001](#).

The health-based requirement is critical to the success of the NAAQS because it means that air pollution limits reflect what level of pollution is safe to breathe. When it wrote the Clean Air Act, Congress intentionally decided that other factors such as cost and feasibility could be addressed in implementing the standard after it has been set.

Through the NAAQS process, the Clean Air Act has improved health and saved lives while the U.S. economy has grown.



Air Quality - National Summary. Source: [EPA](#)

**To ensure the continued success of the Clean Air Act in protecting public health from air pollution, the NAAQS must continue to be revised based solely on health science and must be fully implemented and enforced.**

***Reviewing Standards: EPA must regularly review the science, and if necessary, update the NAAQS to protect public health.***

- When Congress wrote the Clean Air Act, they recognized that the science on the health impacts of air pollution would continue to evolve. Thus, the law requires EPA to review the science every five years and revise the criteria air pollutant standards, if they're found inadequate to protect public health based on current science.

***Enforcement: EPA must enforce air quality standards by identifying which areas have too much pollution and working with the states to develop plans that result in real cleanup.***

- The Clean Air Act requires that once EPA sets the standards based on current health science, it must work with states to identify which areas do not meet the standard and require cleanup.

***For more information:***

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