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### EPA Finds Area in Arecibo, Puerto Rico Does Not Meet Stricter Air Standards for Lead

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(New York, N.Y.) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today informed the government of Puerto Rico that it is proposing to find an area in **Arecibo**, Puerto Rico does not meet the national air quality standard for lead, which is established to protect people's health. The EPA proposes to make this determination based on the most recent air quality data from an air monitor in **Arecibo**. Lead is a toxic metal that can cause damage to a child's ability to learn and a range of health problems in adults. Even at low levels, lead in children can cause I.Q. deficiencies, reading and learning disabilities, impaired hearing, reduced attention spans, hyperactivity and other behavior problems. Lead exposure can also cause health problems in pregnant women and harm fetuses

"Reducing lead pollution in the air is critical to protecting children's health," said Judith A. Enck, EPA Regional Administrator. "Although lead levels in the air have dropped dramatically in the United States, largely as a result of unleaded gasoline, it is essential that every effort is made to meet stricter air quality standards for lead. EPA is closely examining operations at the **Battery Recycling** Company in **Arecibo** and has required the company to take a series of actions to prevent lead contamination from leaving the facility and clean up an adjacent property."

In October 2008, EPA strengthened the nation's air quality standards for lead by ten times to 0.15 micrograms of lead per cubic meter of air based on newly available medical information about the health effects of lead. The agency also finalized requirements for new monitors to be located near large sources of lead pollution. In 2009, the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board identified the **Battery Recycling** Company in **Arecibo** as a significant source of lead and installed a monitoring station to measure lead in the air near the facility. Data from this monitor provided the information that resulted in EPA proposing this area as not meeting the stricter lead standard.


In 2010, based on air quality monitoring data from 2007 to 2009, EPA designated 16 areas across the country as "nonattainment" areas, because they did not meet the new, more stringent health-based air quality standards for lead. Other areas around the country, including the area in **Arecibo**, were considered "unclassifiable" because sufficient data were not available to determine if they met the new lead standard.


In addition to Puerto Rico, EPA notified the governments of Michigan, Illinois, Iowa and Kansas that one area in each state is not meeting the lead standards. EPA solicited recommendations from the governors on how areas should be classified under the lead air quality standard before this second round of determinations was made.

Once an area is designated as violating the standards, the state, commonwealth or territory must develop a formal clean air plan due within three years of EPA's final designation to correct the problem and improve air quality. The agency plans to finalize the designations by October 14, 2011, following a 30-day public comment period.

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the mainland states will have until August 15, 2011 to comment on EPA's proposed determinations and provide additional information. Members of the public are also encouraged to review the proposals and provide comments. The start of the 30-day public comment period will be announced in the *Federal Register*.

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