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### **CHANGE IN AIR QUALITY INDEX SCALE FOR FINE PARTICULATE MATTER (PM2.5)**

**SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA**, – In December 2012, the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lowered the primary annual PM2.5 standard to 12.0 µg/m<sup>3</sup>. This action strengthens the nation's air quality standards for fine particulate pollution to further protect public health. In addition, EPA has modified the AQI scale to incorporate the new PM2.5 standard. The changes to the AQI take effect on March 18, 2013.

The AQI is EPA's color-coded tool for telling the public how clean or polluted the air is, and steps they can take to reduce their daily exposure to pollution. The AQI focuses on health effects individuals may experience within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air. The AQI converts concentrations for criteria pollutants, including fine particles, to a number on a scale from 0 to 500. The AQI scale is broken down into four categories that best represent local air quality conditions: Good, Moderate, Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, and Unhealthy. Each category is a 50 unit index value (e.g., Good ranges from 1 – 50 on the AQI scale).

With recent changes to the PM2.5 standard, EPA updated the AQI scale to become more conservative and reflect the epidemiology and human health effects that are present at lower PM2.5 concentrations. The upper end of the range for the "Good" AQI category (an index value of 50) has been set at the new annual PM2.5 standard (12.0 µg/m<sup>3</sup>). The "Moderate" category upper end of 100 value is set at the 24-hour PM2.5 standard (35 µg/m<sup>3</sup>). In addition, EPA is setting the upper end of the "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups" range (AQI of 150) at 55 µg/m<sup>3</sup>. The new scale will take effect on March 18, 2013 and should result in an increase in the number of reported Moderate air quality days in SLO County. It is important to note that the general air quality conditions in the county are expected to remain the same - the AQI scale is changing, not the air quality conditions.

The forecasted air quality index (AQI) is available on the website [www.slocleanair.org/air/AirForecasting\\_map2.php](http://www.slocleanair.org/air/AirForecasting_map2.php). The forecasted AQI is also available to the public via email. Sign up to receive the daily air quality forecast via email by visiting [www.slocleanair.org/air/AirForecasting.php](http://www.slocleanair.org/air/AirForecasting.php). A recorded message describing San Luis Obispo County air quality conditions is available by calling (805) 781-4390.

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