



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council

**FROM:** Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer

**DATE:** November 15, 2021

**SUBJECT:** **Response to Resolution 20210520-028 – Regional Air Quality Plan**

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On May 20, 2021, City Council passed [Resolution 20210520-028](#), which directed the City Manager to participate in the revision of the 2019-2023 Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown Regional Air Quality Plan by committing the City to the particulate matter (PM2.5) emissions reduction measures proposed in the plan.

Following the City Council resolution, a list of approved commitments was sent to the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG). On July 22, CAPCOG released the plan as a proposed addendum to the 2019-2023 Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown MSA Regional Air Quality Plan, which was officially approved by the Clean Air Coalition on November 10, 2021.

The resolution also calls for implementing and prioritizing high-impact strategies for PM2.5 reduction, including reducing PM2.5 emissions from City construction projects, private construction, outdoor burning activities, and increasing monitoring. In response to the commitments outlined in the Council resolution, the Office of Sustainability has worked with various departments, including the Austin Transportation Department, Austin Energy, Public Works Department, Aviation, Development Services, and Austin Fire Department, to identify the following action updates:

**1) Reduce PM2.5 emissions from City construction projects:**

- **Develop and document dust control plans, with consideration of rescheduling activities during high PM2.5 days.**
- **Pursue deconstruction versus demolition where feasible.**

a. The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) is undergoing an amendment process. As part of this review, the following additions are being proposed for Council consideration:

- *Air and Climate Policy 1:* Reduce emissions generated by the transportation sector.
  - *Revised Policy:* Pursue strategies and collaborate with regional partners to reduce ozone, particulate matter, and greenhouse gas emissions, including promoting sustainable transportation modes and improving traffic flow.
  - *New Action Item:* Create dust mitigation plans for transportation construction projects in alignment with our City commitments and best practices outlined in the proposed addendum to the Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown Regional Air Quality Plan.

b. The Austin-Bergstrom International Airport and the Public Works Department utilize dust mitigation in their construction specifications. There is an opportunity to provide additional education, guidance, and checklists for existing processes around erosion sedimentation and environmental controls. The Office of Sustainability will collaborate with both departments to establish the best avenues for advancing this work in future projects. Additionally, the City can follow established mechanisms for communication regarding Ozone Action Days to spread awareness of forecasted high particulate matter days internally and among the larger community.

c. As part of the City of Austin Green Building Policy Update focused on City Capital Improvement and Public/Private partnership projects, the Office of Sustainability and Austin Energy Green Building collaborated to add the following statement under the Net-Zero and Low Carbon Performance Strategies section. The strategy could help improve air quality and reduce emissions.

- *Strategy:* For new construction, consider designing for deconstruction and material reuse at end-of-life to reduce construction and demolition waste and to lower embodied carbon impact.

## **2) Reduce PM2.5 emissions from private construction:**

- **Provide outreach and education to private developers and construction permit applicants on best practices for reducing construction and road dust.**

a. The Office of Sustainability will coordinate with the Development Services Department's public information team to provide and distribute educational material regarding mitigating dust in construction sites on high particulate matter days.

## **3) Reduce PM2.5 emissions from prescribed and outdoor burning:**

- **Ensure enforcement of the State's Outdoor Burning Rule and local burn bans to help reduce open burning.**

a. The City of Austin currently exceeds the State's Outdoor Burning Rule. A permit from the Fire Marshal's Office is required to partake in any open burning, including the burning of trash, yard clippings, tree trimmings, etc. These permits are not granted frequently, and open burning without a permit is prohibited and may result in a citation. The department works diligently to enforce local restrictions on open burning and will continue to do so.

- **Consider potential code amendments to allow high PM2.5 days as a factor for allowing prescribed burning activities.**

b. Given the nature of prescribed burning and the jurisdictional fluidity of policy and enforcement, the Austin Fire Department noted that further action at the state level is needed to increase regulations on prescribed burning. Data from 2016-2020 shows that high days of local daily PM2.5 values did not correlate with prescribed fire activities carried out by the City of Austin. The Office of Sustainability will communicate with Austin Fire and any prescribed fire teams in the region to alert them of forecasted high PM2.5 days. The teams will consider this as feasible when they carry out planned activities.

## **4) Increase monitoring of PM2.5 emissions:**

- **Support expanded PM2.5 monitoring opportunities, particularly in areas with populations with increased sensitivity to air pollution due to disproportionate rates of respiratory conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.**

a. The Office of Sustainability has partnered with the Austin Independent School District and the Clean Air Force of Central Texas to deploy [Purple Air](#) air quality sensors across various elementary and middle schools in the district. The Clean Air Force will be working with Austin ISD to adopt an air quality and citizen science curriculum for appropriate grade levels.

Criteria for the schools chosen included variables such as:

- Title 1 designation

- Proximity to major highways
- Participation in green initiatives

b. The Office of Sustainability and Austin Transportation's Smart Mobility Office are in the process of finalizing a partnership between the City and the University of Texas at Austin (UT) to install low-cost air sensors on City property over the next five years. The City is collaborating with UT and the Dell Medical School to use available demographic and modeling data to place sensors in areas with high sensitivity to exposure.

**Next Steps:**

The Office of Sustainability will coordinate with City departments and external partners to report on any particulate matter-focused actions to CAPCOG annually, following the same schedule as former air quality reporting, which typically takes place in the summer. CAPCOG will compile reporting on any actions by the City and regional jurisdictions into an annual report.

If you have any questions, please contact Zach Baumer, Climate Program Manager, at [Zach.Baumer@austintexas.gov](mailto:Zach.Baumer@austintexas.gov).

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