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DEQ, partners celebrate air quality milestone

BATON ROUGE – Today, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and its partners celebrated the redesignation of the five parish area around Baton Rouge from nonattainment to attainment for the air pollutant ozone. EPA's redesignation means it is changing Baton Rouge's status from out of attainment to attainment.

The air quality achievement is the results of the partnership and cooperation of federal, state and local governments, industry and citizens. The attainment status affects over 800,000 residents and is a demonstration of air quality improvements across the state.

Previously, the Baton Rouge five-parish area was designated by EPA as nonattainment with the 1997 8-hour ozone standard. However, through emission reductions, technological advances and teamwork, the air quality in Baton Rouge has improved enough where the data shows this area now meets the 1997 8-hour standard. In fact, the entire state meets this standard.

Louisiana has demonstrated that the five-parish area will be able to maintain compliance with the ozone standard for the next ten years. Current air pollution controls enable the area to maintain clean air quality.

"This is a momentous occasion for the state, the environment and especially for the Greater Baton Rouge area," said DEQ Secretary Peggy Hatch. "I want to commend our federal partners for their guidance and industry, business, the community and citizens for their cooperation. This is truly an achievement that could not have happened without everyone's help. This will be good for business, the citizens and state and local government and will open up the area to more economic opportunities. It's also important to note that when the new ozone standards and attainment or nonattainment designations become official, this doesn't mean air quality is going backward to previous levels. The standards change. The attainment levels get stricter. The air quality remains the best it's been and we will strive to reach the next air quality goal put before us."

"EPA is very proud of the progress made by the LDEQ and its many stakeholders to reach the goal of attainment of the ozone standard," said Thomas Diggs, EPA Region 6 Air Chief. "This is a very significant milestone reflecting cleaner, healthier air quality for citizens of Baton Rouge."