



Provincial Air Quality Objective Information Sheet

British Columbia Ambient Air Quality Objectives

Introduction

The British Columbia *Environmental Management Act*¹ provides the Minister of Environment with the authority to develop objectives to manage air quality in B.C. Air quality objectives are non-statutory limits (i.e. not legally binding). Air quality objectives are used to:

- Gauge current and historical air quality,
- Guide decisions on environmental impact assessments and authorizations,
- Guide airshed planning efforts,
- Inform regulatory development, and
- Develop and apply episode management strategies such as air quality advisories.

Status of Air Quality Criteria in B.C.

The province of B.C. uses a suite of ambient air quality criteria that have been developed provincially and nationally to inform decisions on the management of air contaminants (see Tables 1 and 2). These include Provincial Air Quality Objectives (AQOs)², National Ambient Air Quality Objectives (NAAQOs)³ and Canadian Ambient Air Quality Standards (CAAQS).⁴ Metro Vancouver has also established air quality objectives that apply within its region.⁵

For any particular averaging period, a range of air quality criteria may exist, reflecting the different conditions under which the criteria were historically applied. To begin streamlining the existing framework of air quality criteria and to better reflect current practices (subject to site-specific considerations by the Director), only the most stringent criteria for each averaging period and management level are identified in Table 1. The contents of this table will be updated as new objectives are adopted.

For more information on air quality objectives, visit www.bcairquality.ca or contact:

B.C. Ministry of Environment
Environmental Standards Branch
Tel: (250) 387-9537

¹ http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/03053_00

² For more information, see: [Air Regulatory Framework](#)

³ Canada Gazette, Part I, Department of the Environment, *National Ambient Air Quality Objectives for Air Contaminants*, August 12, 1989.

⁴ CAAQS for PM_{2.5} and ozone were endorsed by the Minister of Environment in 2012 and by Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, and supersede Canada-wide Standards for Particulate Matter and Ozone (see: <http://www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p1/2013/2013-05-25/html/notice-avis-eng.html#d106>). CAAQS for SO₂ were endorsed by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment in 2016.

⁵ Metro Vancouver (2011) *Metro Vancouver Integrated Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Management Plan*.

<http://public.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/IntegratedAirQualityGreenhouseGasManagementPlan-October2011.pdf>

Table 1. Summary of B.C. ambient air quality objectives. Those criteria published in the original units are highlighted in bold. Where conversions have been made between ppb and $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, calculations have been based on 25°C and 1 atm.

Contaminant	Avg. Period	Air Quality Objective		Source	Date Adopted by Source
		$\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	ppb		
Formaldehyde (HCHO)	1 hour	60 ⁶	50	Provincial AQO	1995
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)	1-hour	188	100 ⁷	Interim Provincial AQO	2014
	Annual	60	32		
Ozone (O₃)	1-hour	160	82	NAAQO ⁸	1989
	8 hour	123	63 ⁹	CAAQS	2013
Particulate Matter <2.5 microns (PM_{2.5})	24 hour	25 ¹⁰	-	Provincial AQO	2009
		28 ¹¹	-	CAAQS	2013
	Annual	8 ¹²	-	Provincial AQO	2009
Particulate Matter <10 microns (PM₁₀)	24 hour	10 ¹³	-	CAAQS	2013
		50	-	Provincial AQO	1995
Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂)	1-hour	196	75 ¹⁴	Interim Provincial AQO	Dec. 2016
	1-hour	183	70 ¹⁵	CAAQS	2016
	Annual	13	5 ¹⁶	CAAQS	2016
Total Suspended Particulate (TSP)	24-hour	120	-	NAAQO	1974
	Annual	60 ¹⁷	-	NAAQO	1974

⁶ Target level for managing formaldehyde in an airshed. Episode level of 370 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ is level above which immediate steps should be taken to reduce the release of formaldehyde into the atmosphere.

⁷ Achievement based on annual 98th percentile of daily 1-hour maximum (D1HM), over one year.

⁸ The NAAQOs for ozone were replaced by the CAAQS, but the 1-hour NAAQO of 82 ppb is retained for air quality advisories.

⁹ Achievement based on annual 4th highest daily 8-hour maximum, averaged over three consecutive years.

¹⁰ Achievement based on annual 98th percentile of daily average, over one year.

¹¹ Achievement based on annual 98th percentile of daily average, averaged over three consecutive years.

¹² Achievement based on annual average, over one year. Planning goal of 6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ provides voluntary target to guide airshed planning efforts and encourage communities to maintain good air quality in face of economic growth and development.

¹³ Achievement based on annual average, averaged over three consecutive years.

¹⁴ Achievement based on annual 97th percentile of D1HM averaged over 2015-2017, annual 97.5th percentile of D1HM averaged over 2016-2018 and annual 98th percentile of D1HM averaged over 2017-2019, with one allowable excursion above 75 ppb to a maximum of 85 ppb over a three-year period prior to 2020. Superseded by CAAQS level and metric January 1, 2020.

¹⁵ Achievement based on annual 99th percentile of D1HM, averaged over three consecutive years, effective January 1, 2020. Used to inform new air management decisions beginning January 1, 2017 and all air management decisions beginning January 1, 2020.

¹⁶ Achievement based on annual average of 1-hour concentrations over one year, effective January 1, 2020. Used to inform new air management decisions beginning January 1, 2017 and all air management decisions beginning January 1, 2020.

¹⁷ Based on geometric mean.

Table 2. B.C. Pollution Control Objectives (used for reference purposes).¹⁸

Contaminant	Avg. Period	Air Quality Objective		Source	Date Adopted
		µg/m ³	ppb		
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	1 hour	14,300	13,000	PCOs for Food-processing, Agriculturally Orientated, and Other Misc. Industries	1975
	8 hour	5,500	5,000		1975
Total Reduced Sulphur (TRS) compounds measured as H ₂ S	1 hour	7	5	PCOs for the Forest Products Industry	1977
	24 hour	3	2		1977

¹⁸ Pollution Control Objectives were developed by the B.C. Ministry of Environment and the B.C. Department of Lands, Forest and Water Resources in the 1970s for five source sectors. These criteria, which referred to all discharges to the environment, were rescinded in 2006, but the ambient air quality objectives continue to be used for reference purposes.