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VAN BUREN COUNTY

Air quality up in Van Buren, other counties

Berrien, Cass counties also may make federal clean air list soon

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PAW PAW — The air quality in Van Buren County and 10 other lower Michigan counties has improved to the point where it meets federal clean air stan-

dards, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality officials announced.

And it's likely Berrien and Cass counties will be added to that list soon.

Based on ongoing monitoring of ground-level ozone levels in 11 counties including Van Buren, the federal Environmental Protection Agency recently approved a request from the DEQ to redesignate the counties to show they meet the federal standards.

"We are continuing to make

significant progress in improving the air quality across Michigan," DEQ Director Steven Chester said. "These efforts are protecting the health of Michigan families and ensuring the quality of Michigan's environment."

The new designation could be an incentive for economic development, as new manufacturing facilities may not have to face as strict a permitting process as before, DEQ officials noted.

Driving the improvements in ozone levels in Van Buren and

the other 10 counties are improvements made to manufacturing facilities, such as better emission control filters and technologies, said DEQ's Robert McCann.

"We've made a lot of improvements," McCann said. "We've been tracking this for several years."

The other 10 counties to be redesignated are Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Kent, Ottawa, Kalamazoo, Benzie, Mason, Huron and Ingham.

McCann said a separate

request to redesignate Berrien, Cass, Muskegon, Lapeer and Genesee counties to reflect federal air quality attainment has been forwarded to the EPA for review since the first request was sent, but no action has been taken.

"We feel we've presented them (the EPA) with a strong case that Berrien and Cass have attained the federal standards too," he said. "We're hoping (an announcement) will be soon."

Allegan County, just north of Van Buren County, has not yet

been considered for federal redesignation, McCann said. The problem is that the DEQ believes as much as 98 percent of Allegan County's ozone comes across Lake Michigan from northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, McCann said.

That's a problem that would have to be tackled regionally, not just by Michigan, he said.

"We've obviously made the EPA aware of our findings (about Allegan County's air quality)," McCann said.