



# Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • [www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov)

## Particulate Matter

### What is it?

Particulate matter (PM) is made of solid particles and liquid droplets that are in the air.

### Where does it come from?

Particulate matter can come from many places. In general, any type of burning of materials or any dust-generating activities are sources of particulate matter. Here are some examples:

- Smoke (from semi-trucks, fireplaces, industrial plant smoke stacks)
- Burning wood, diesel, and oil
- Swirls of dirt that form when the wind blows
- Construction activities

### Does it come in different sizes?

Particulate matter comes in many different sizes. Larger particles come mostly from the soil. Smaller particles come from burning of fossil fuels, like gasoline in cars and coal used by power plants.

### What are the health effects of breathing in particulate matter?

The smaller the particles, the more dangerous they are because they can travel deeper into the lungs. Breathing in particulate matter can cause:

- Breathing problems due to damage and irritation to the lungs.
- Aggravation of asthma, lung, or heart disease in people who already suffer from these problems.
- Difficulty breathing in children and the elderly.
- Chronic bronchitis.
- Irritation of eyes, throat, skin, and nose.

### What are the environmental effects of particulate matter?

Particulate matter can cause decreased visibility. In the eastern U.S., visibility in some areas has been reduced to 14-24 miles. Natural visibility should be about 90 miles in these areas. The airborne particles can also damage buildings.

### How can you protect yourself and the environment from particulate matter?

- Try to stay away from dust that has recently been stirred up and from smoky areas.
- Carpool, walk, or bike whenever possible.
- Keep cars well tuned and maintained.
- Conserve electricity.

### For more information, visit:

<http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/baq/AirPollutants/effects.asp>

<http://www.epa.gov/particles/>

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