Early data from a major research project could form the basis for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency adopting a new approach to setting particulate matter standards already being pursued by the Valley Air District.

In a story in Inside EPA’s Clean Air Report dated April 26, a member of EPA’s Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee PM review panel said that early data from a major new study “supports the plausibility that fine particles are affecting human health” and points to adopting a “risk-based” approach to regulation, instead of the “mass-based” approach currently set by EPA.

A mass-based approach aims to reduce overall levels of PM without distinguishing differences in emissions from various sources. A risk-based approach, which is being pursued by the Air District in developing its new fine-particulate (PM2.5) plan, recognizes that certain types of fine-particulate matter are more dangerous to health than others.

According to the new national study, PM2.5 from sources such as traffic and coal combustion is the biggest risk to public health.

The Air District held a technical modeling symposium with the state Air Resources Board in April to explore this new approach. In the Valley, motor vehicles account for most of our air pollution.