

AIR POLLUTION LONDON'S UNSEEN KILLER!



“Over 4000 Londoners die early each year as a result of air pollution – more than from alcoholism or obesity. London is the most air polluted capital in Europe – but Government inaction means we won’t meet EU safety levels until at least 2025. This isn’t good enough!”

JEAN LAMBERT, LONDON'S GREEN MEP





London's air is so polluted the UK Government thinks it won't meet European Union safety levels until 2025. London has the highest levels of the toxic gas NO₂ of any capital city in Europe. Levels are similar to Beijing. This is simply not good enough, and is the result of inaction by the London Mayor and UK Government.

Why is London's air so polluted?

London's air pollution is primarily caused by too much road traffic including too many highly polluting vehicles. Many vehicles are simply passing through London and many journeys could be made by other means – walking, cycling or public transport.

Older vehicles are particularly polluting and diesel vehicles, whilst having lower carbon emissions, are worse than petrol vehicles for air pollution.

What is air pollution?

Air pollution is made up of harmful particles (PM) such as diesel soot, tyre and brakewear, and gases. These gases are mainly nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and ozone.

Over 4,000¹ London deaths are caused by long-term exposure to air pollution. This is about the same number of deaths caused by London's Great Smog of 1952. At least 29,000² deaths are caused by air pollution in Britain each year.

Air pollution causes more premature deaths than alcoholism or obesity. Only smoking causes more early deaths than air pollution in Britain³. It has been strongly linked to asthma, lung cancer and cardiovascular illness.

1 Institute of Occupational Medicine study. 2 Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants study. 3 Clean Air in London, Guide to health impacts.

Changes in daily pollution levels have been strongly associated with variations in daily deaths and hospital admissions for respiratory conditions. The gas NO₂ has been strongly linked with emphysema, bronchitis, and heart disease.

Who is most at risk?

Air pollution affects us all, but some people are at greater health risk than others. Studies show that the following groups are at high risk:

Children. Pollution is greater at child height and children's lungs are still growing. Children whose schools are near a busy road are at even greater risk.

Older people. The respiratory systems of older people are more vulnerable and take longer to repair or recover than those of younger adults.

Asthma sufferers and people with other respiratory or cardiovascular conditions.

People living near a busy road. Those living within 150 metres are at greater risk. For people living within 50 metres the risk is even higher.

Poorer people. Health inequality is a major problem in London. Poorer people have lower life expectancy and more illness than rich people. They are more likely to live near busy roads than rich people, suffering greater exposure to air pollution.

These higher risk groups add up to a very large number of Londoners. But because we are all moving around a highly polluted city, everyone's health is threatened.



CHILDREN AT RISK Over 1,000 London schools and nurseries are within 150 metres of roads carrying over 10,000 vehicles per day. 320,000 children attend these schools, of which more than 180,000 are younger than 11. Studies of 25 European cities found that living close to high-traffic roads could be responsible for 15-30% of new asthma cases in children. Other research suggests that pollution levels at schools contribute to the development of asthma.

Source: Policy Exchange, Something In The Air, p24, summarising research and Freedom of Information request by Clean Air in London.

What needs to happen?



Right: Jean Lambert, Green MEP for London with Darren Johnson, Green London Assembly Member and clean air campaigners



A **Very Low Emission Zone** for central London as soon as possible to restrict more polluting vehicles. Similar zones have reduced pollution elsewhere, such as in Berlin. Additional measures should be taken for other pollution hotspots.

Clean up the buses. All new buses should be low emission hybrid, hydrogen or electric. Current buses should be retrofitted. The whole bus fleet needs to run on these technologies.

A new **Taxi Strategy** to reduce emissions. Taxis are a major feature of London life but they should be much less polluting.

Steps to encourage **more walking and cycling**, reducing car journeys.

20mph speed limit for all residential streets. This can cut air pollutant emissions by smoothing traffic flow. It also makes walking and cycling safer and more attractive.

UK fails EU air quality standards

European air quality legislation aims to protect public health, and has set legal safety limits for each pollutant. The UK is failing to meet these limits, and the problem is worst in London. This is a major health risk, particularly as some of these limits are less stringent than World Health Organisation Guidelines.*

In London EU pollution limits for two harmful pollutants (PM₁₀ and NO₂) are regularly breached – and the problem continues.

The UK Government has applied for time extensions, but the legality of these is being challenged. The Government insists that London cannot meet NO₂ safety limits until 2025, but is failing to properly fund and implement necessary anti-pollution measures.

Failure at City Hall

The London Mayor, Boris Johnson, has also been widely criticised for failing to act and for using ‘pollution suppressants’ which only lower the readings along roads close to air quality monitoring sites – by glueing pollution to the roads.

Due to these failings, complaints have been brought to the EU Commission, which is rightly looking at infringement proceedings against the UK, which could lead to fines.

* For example, WHO guidelines for PM₁₀ are twice as stringent as EU limits.

- i Try not to be a part of the problem! Drive less, walk and cycle more**
- i Protect yourself – follow daily smog alerts and avoid the most polluted areas**

EU Air Quality - no weakening of standards!

The EU began to review its policies on air pollution in 2013, including the rules which set air quality standards. MEPs, the UK Government, other Member State governments and the Commission will all be involved. Regional governments like the Greater London Authority/London Mayor and other stakeholders will also have an influence.

The UK Government's approach to the review has raised concerns. It has said it will use the review to press for 'Amendments to the Air Quality Directive which reduce the infraction risk faced by most Member States, especially in relation to nitrogen dioxide provisions.'⁴

WHAT YOU CAN DO - visit www.jeanlambertmep.org.uk/air

Ask your MP to press the UK Government to take concrete measures to reduce air pollution in London and other pollution hotspots.

Write to the EU Commission and your MEPs calling for infringement action to be taken against the UK unless it demonstrates meaningful action to tackle air pollution. Call for the Air Quality review to retain high limits on all main pollutants and for a robust implementation and infringement regime.

Press the London Mayor to take real action, including introducing a stricter Low Emission Zone and improving the performance of buses and taxis.

⁴ Defra, Red Tape Challenge – Environment theme proposals, March 2012, p7.

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