

AIR POLLUTION LONDON'S UNSEEN KILLER!



Nearly 9500 Londoners die early each year due to air pollution – more than from alcoholism or obesity. London is the most air polluted capital in Europe, but Government and City Hall failure means we won't meet EU safety levels until after 2030. This is shameful. **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 after 2030. 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. The UK's 50 most polluted roads are all in London! 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 some have 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.

Nearly 9,500¹ London deaths are caused each year by long-term exposure to air pollution. This is more than double the number of deaths caused by London's Great Smog of 1952. Around 60-80,000 annual UK deaths are estimated to be caused by air pollution.²

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 King's College London, 2015, Understanding the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in London. The research shows 9,416 deaths. 2 Studies are due to be published in 2015 by King's College London and the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants. 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. In 2013 the World Health Organisation classified air pollution as a human carcinogen.

Who is most at risk?

Air pollution affects us all, but some people are at greater health risk than others:

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. 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



- London's **Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ)** should start operating much sooner than 2020 – no later than 2018 – and be extended to a larger area of inner London. Additional ULEZs are needed for other pollution hotspots, including Heathrow. Similar zones have reduced pollution elsewhere, such as Berlin.
- **Clean up the buses.** All new buses should be low emission hybrid, hydrogen or electric. Current buses should be retrofitted. All London buses should be either zero-emission vehicles or hybrids which meet Euro VI standards as soon as possible.
- A new **Taxi Strategy** to reduce emissions. Taxis are a major feature of London life but they should be much less polluting.
- Greater action to encourage more **walking and cycling**, reducing car journeys and other road traffic.
- **20mph speed limit** for all residential streets. This can cut vehicle 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 safety limits for particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) have been regularly breached – and the problem continues.

The UK Government has applied for time extensions, but the legality of these has been successfully challenged. The Government now insists that London cannot meet NO₂ safety limits until after 2030, but is failing to properly fund and implement necessary anti-pollution measures. The UK Supreme Court has now ordered the Government to submit an improved Air Quality Action Plan to the European Commission and take immediate action to tackle air pollution.

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

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. There are 300 New Routemaster buses which currently fail to meet the least-polluting Euro VI standards and there are no plans to retrofit them.

The failure and inaction of the UK Government and London Mayor have led to complaints being brought to the European Commission. The Commission is rightly looking at infringement proceedings against the UK, which could lead to major fines.

EU Air Quality - no weakening of standards!

The European Union has led the way on air quality, partly due to the influence of Green MEPs. Currently these EU laws are being reviewed, and Green MEPs are pressing for higher standards with robust rules and enforcement.

Disgracefully the UK Government is using the review to try to water down standards. It is pressing for 'amendments to the Air Quality Directive which reduce the infraction risk faced by most Member States, especially in relation to nitrogen dioxide provisions'. Leaked documents also show the Government lobbying for weaker EU air pollution laws.*

* Defra, March 2012, Red Tape Challenge: Environment theme proposals, p7; Guardian, 12 Aug 2015, UK lobbying for even weaker EU air pollution laws, leaked papers show.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

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 the new air quality laws to be more ambitious, with high limits on all main pollutants and a robust implementation and infringement regime.

Call for the London Mayor to introduce an earlier, more ambitious Ultra Low Emission Zone and improve the performance of buses and taxis.

Support Green campaigns to clean up London's air.

See jeanlambertmep.org.uk/air and london.greenparty.org.uk.

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