



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

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Environment: New policy package to clean up Europe's air

The human toll for poor air quality is worse than for road traffic accidents, making it the number one environmental cause of premature death in the EU. It also impacts the quality of life due to asthma or respiratory problems. The Commission is responding with new measures to reduce air pollution, adopted today. The clean air policy package updates existing legislation and further reduces harmful emissions from industry, traffic, energy plants and agriculture, with a view to reducing their impact on human health and the environment. Air pollution causes also lost working days, and high healthcare costs, with vulnerable groups such as children, asthmatics and the elderly the worst affected. It also damages ecosystems through excess nitrogen pollution (eutrophication) and acid rain. The direct costs to society from air pollution, including damage to crops and buildings, amount to about €23 billion per year. The benefits to people's health from implementing the package are around €40 billion a year, over 12 times the costs of pollution abatement, which are estimated to reach € 3.4 billion per year in 2030.

Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said: *"The air we breathe today is much cleaner than in past decades. But air pollution is still an 'invisible killer' and it prevents many people from living a fully active life. The actions we are proposing will halve the number of premature deaths from air pollution, increase protection for the vulnerable groups who need it most, and improve quality of life for all. It's also good news for nature and fragile ecosystems, and it will boost the clean technology industry – an important growth sector for Europe."*

Health Commissioner Tonio Borg added: *"I wholeheartedly welcome the adoption of the clean air package which sets Europe on the right track to achieve clean air for all in the long term. The new air policy will translate into Europeans living healthier and longer lives: fewer children developing asthma or other respiratory problems, fewer people suffering from cancer, chronic respiratory diseases or cardiovascular diseases and finally fewer people dying from what air pollution does to people's health."*

The package adopted today has a number of components. They include:

- A new **Clean Air Programme for Europe** with measures to ensure that existing targets are met in the short term, and new air quality objectives for the period up to 2030. The package also includes support measures to help cut air pollution, with a focus on improving air quality in cities, supporting research and innovation, and promoting international cooperation
- A revised **National Emission Ceilings Directive** with stricter national emission ceilings for the six main pollutants, and
- A proposal for a **new Directive to reduce pollution from medium-sized combustion installations**, such as energy plants for street blocks or large buildings, and small industry installations.

By 2030, and compared to business as usual, the clean air policy package is estimated to:

- avoid 58 000 premature deaths,
- save 123 000 km² of ecosystems from nitrogen pollution (more than half the area of Romania),
- save 56 000 km² protected Natura 2000 areas (more than the entire area of Croatia) from nitrogen pollution,
- save 19 000 km² forest ecosystems from acidification.

Health benefits alone will save society €40-140 billion in external costs and provide about €3 billion in direct benefits due to higher productivity of the workforce, lower healthcare costs, higher crop yields and less damage to buildings. The proposal will also add the equivalent of around 100 000 additional jobs due to increased productivity and competitiveness because of fewer workdays lost. It is estimated to have a positive net impact on economic growth.

The proposal is based on the conclusions of a comprehensive review of existing EU air policy. It comes after extensive consultations that found broad support for EU-wide action in this area.

Background

Many EU Member States are still falling short of agreed EU air quality standards, and the air pollution guidelines of the UN World Health Organization are generally not being met.

While EU air quality policy has brought significant reductions in concentrations of harmful pollutants such as particulate matter, sulphur dioxide (the main cause of acid rain), lead, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and benzene, major problems remain. Fine particulates and ozone, in particular, continue to present significant health risks and safe limits for health are regularly exceeded. EU air quality standards and targets are breached in many regions and cities, and public health suffers accordingly, with rising costs to health care and the economy. The total external health-related costs to society from air pollution are estimated to be in the range of €330-940 billion per year. The situation is especially severe in urban areas, which are now home to a majority of Europeans.

The package adopted today is the culmination of a major review of air policy that began in early 2011.

For more information:

Link to the draft proposal and to the study (with the figures for MS, as mentioned above):

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/clean_air_policy.htm

See also:

Q&A MEMO: [MEMO/13/1169](#)

[Fact sheet](#)

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/index.htm>

<http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air>

http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2013/at_download/file

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/review_air_policy.htm

Audio visual material (VNR) available at tvlink.org

WHO air quality guidelines:

http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/outdoorair_aqg/en/index.html

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