

Healthy Air Where You Live



A community campaign pack to help
you raise awareness of and tackle
air pollution in your area



Introduction

We often think about the food we eat and how that affects our health, but how often do we consider the impact of the air that we are breathing? The truth is, the air that a lot of us inhale on the way to work, school and in our neighbourhoods is harming our health.

Every year, 29,000 premature deaths are attributable to poor air quality in the UK. For those affected air pollution reduces life expectancy by an average of over eleven years. This is nearly 5% of all annual UK deaths but amazingly, there is very little awareness of the problem, making air pollution an invisible public health crisis that affects much of the UK.

The most vulnerable in our communities are the worst affected, with children, the elderly, those with existing health problems and underprivileged communities disproportionately affected.

Here's a guide to making Healthy Air where you live, work or play. It includes:

-  A fact sheet on pollution sources and its impacts
-  A guide to reducing your exposure to pollution and simple steps to cut it
-  A guide to air pollution law
-  A step-by-step guide to finding out about air pollution and raising awareness in your area
-  Template letter and press release
-  Advice on setting up your own Healthy Air event
-  A Healthy Air supporter poster and event flyer
-  Links to further resources



Know your air

Equip yourself with these simple facts about air pollution and its health impacts:

Air pollution: what is it and what causes it?

There are many kinds of air pollutants. The three kinds primarily causing us health problems are **Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)** (not to be confused with Nitrous Oxide – ‘laughing gas’), **Ozone (O₃)** and **particulate matter (PM)**.

The latest evidence suggests **particulate matter is the most damaging to our health**. These are tiny particles suspended in the air. Particulate matter is classified according to the maximum size of the particles. ‘PM₁₀’ refers to all particles under 10 micrometers in diameter (0.001 mm), whilst ‘PM_{2.5}’ refers to all particles under 2.5 micrometers in diameter. Particles can be formed from a wide variety of substances, from soot to liquid droplets.

The impacts of polluted air

29,000 people in the UK are estimated to die 11.5 years early on average, due to long term exposure to air pollution, every year. Over 4,000 of those are in London. **Only smoking causes more early deaths.**

Air pollution has a range of long and short term health impacts. Short term impacts can include mild symptoms such as irritation of the airways, sore throats and headaches, to severe impacts such as asthma and heart attacks.

Up to 70% of air pollution (including the three types above) may be caused by road traffic – the cars, buses, taxis, vans and lorries driving on our streets. The proximity of roads to where we live, work and play makes the health impact of pollution even greater

Diesel vehicles are a particular problem, as **diesel vehicles emit significantly more pollution than equivalent petrol-powered vehicles**. Since 2001 the proportion of new diesel cars sold has jumped from 14% to 46%. This change has been almost entirely driven by government taxation policy, making air pollution problems worse.

Long-term impacts may include **permanently reduced lung function in children, the causation of cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness such as asthma, and early death.**

Some evidence suggests exposure to air pollution during pregnancy may reduce the birth weight of new born babies.

The cost of these health and other impacts of air pollution is estimated to **cost the UK economy up to £17 billion pounds per year**. The benefits of reducing air pollution far outweigh the costs.



Reduce your exposure and cut pollution

If you live or work in a polluted area, moving house or changing job probably isn't really an option. However, there are some simple solutions that can help reduce you and your family's exposure to air pollution. The first step is to understand where and when air pollution is likely to be worse and try to avoid going out in it, especially if you are planning moderate or heavy exercise (when you breathe in more deeply and at a faster rate). Here are three common sense rules of thumb when thinking about where and when air pollution is worse:

Avoid walking, jogging or cycling along busy roads with lots of traffic, especially at rush hour. Try to plan a route that sticks to side roads or goes through parks or other green areas. There are tools online to do this such as [Walkit](#), or Transport for London's [Journey Planner](#) or [Google Maps](#).

In rural areas, ozone pollution episodes (events where pollution is particularly bad) tend to occur in afternoons, especially when there is hot weather.

Air pollution tends to be worse on very cold or very hot days when there is little wind to disperse the pollution.

Adapting to avoid pollution is one option, but to seriously tackle the problem we need to cut, or mitigate, the amount of pollution we create. After all, if we didn't produce pollution, we wouldn't need to avoid it. The main way we can help is by changing the way we travel. Here's some advice for helping make our air healthy:

Nearly a quarter of all car journeys are less than one mile. If you're just popping to the corner shops, think about using a bike or walking if you are able to.

If you're taking the kids to school, time can be tight. If you car pooled with other parents you could pick up each other's kids on different days, saving you both time and cutting pollution. Even better, if you have the time, walk or cycle with the kids to school to get fit and save money. You could see if there is a local bike train running from your neighbourhood to your school too.

Turn your car engine off when at a standstill, especially if you're parked outside a school and

even at traffic lights. Idling creates a lot of pollution. Turning your engine off and on is absolutely fine for your car (it's what it's designed to do!), will cut pollution and save fuel while you wait.

Take public transport where you can.

If you're buying a new car, ask about its emission standards (not just CO₂) and check it is as least polluting as possible.

Check out our partner websites for excellent advice on more sustainable, less polluting travel: [Campaign for Better Transport](#), [Clean Air in London](#), [Living Streets](#) and [Sustrans](#).



Air pollution and the law

In the UK, air quality is governed by law at European level and Devolved Administration level.

The European Union (EU) sets legally binding limits for levels of major air pollutants under an ambient [air quality directive](#). This directive will be under review in 2013, the European 'Year of Air'.

If any member state of the EU breaches these safe limits, they potentially face huge fines from the European Commission. The UK Government is currently in breach of these limits but has been using delaying tactics to avoid fines, rather than tackle the problem.

Primary responsibility for ensuring that EU air quality [limits](#) are met is with The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The government also sets out air quality standards and objectives in the [UK Air Quality Strategy](#).

Under the Environment Act of 1995 local authorities are also required to review air quality in their area and in places where air quality limits are exceeded, they have to designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) where they have to work towards certain air quality objectives. An air quality action plan, describing the pollution reduction measures, must then be put in place. Read more about local [air quality management](#).

It can be difficult for local authorities to manage air quality within their area, especially if the problem is caused by something outside of their control (such as a motorway passing through an urban area)

What does Government need to do?

The Healthy Air Campaign is calling on the government to take the following five actions to ensure the UK fully complies with EU air quality law by 2015:

1. **Fund a national campaign raising public awareness of the impacts of air pollution** on health, the causes and solutions
2. **Launch a cross-department strategy to tackle air pollution** that is led by the Cabinet Office (ensuring action on air pollution is included in all relevant departmental business plans by 2013 and including independently monitored performance measures with incentives and penalties for departments involved)
3. **Introduce a national framework for Low Emission Zones**, providing local authorities with the support (both funding and through policy guidance) to establish LEZs in urban areas by 2014.
4. **Fund further research into the health impacts of air pollution** through an appropriate body such as COMEAP (Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution).
5. **Immediately cease all activities seeking to postpone or delay action on meeting legally binding EU air quality standards**, or attempting to weaken those standards in the run up to and during the 2013 European Year of Air.



Air pollution where you live

A step-by-step guide to finding out more and raising awareness where you live.



1. Local knowledge:

Find out if air pollution is a problem where you live:

Check air pollution reports before you head out to exercise, especially if you have a respiratory or cardiovascular condition. The [BBC weather website](#) gives a pollution index (Low, Medium, High or Very High). You can read more about the index [here](#).

Check to see if your local authority has an [air quality management area](#) where there are air quality problems.

There are some services that send texts when pollution episodes are occurring in certain areas, such as [CERC's airTEXT](#) or [Sussex AirAlert](#). Look on your local authority website to see if you have a service in your areas.

Use [WhatDoTheyKnow.com](#) to submit an information request to find out something about air quality where you live using Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Regulation powers e.g. to your local authority, Defra or the Department for Transport. Emphasise your enquiry relates to 'emissions to the air'.

If you're up for it, there are ways you can monitor pollution yourself (however, be aware

that the quality of the data you get may not be reliable). One of the cheapest ways is to monitor NO₂ (which is also an indicator of the presence of other pollutants) using little plastic devices called 'diffusion tubes'. For an example of a project that's used them, take a look at the Sheffield East End Quality of Life Initiative. Further information can be found [here](#) too.

If you live in London:

Look up the Mayor's estimate of air pollution levels in your ward in 2008 and the number of premature deaths attributable to it. Also, check out our partner, Clean Air in London's estimates of the number of premature deaths in each London borough based on the Mayor's health study.

You can download a smart phone app for checking air quality in your area. If you live in London there are some excellent resources for checking pollution as [LAQN's iPhone app](#) and the [London Air Quality Network website](#).

Find out if you are near one of London's busiest roads or if a school you know is near one of them

2. What's being done about air quality?

Find out who's doing what about air pollution:

If your local authority has declared an AQMA it needs to have an Air Quality Action Plan, which sets out a strategy for tackling air pollution. Search for your local authority's plan on their website, or call them to ask for a copy.

See what the European Commission has to [say on air quality](#) and find out [what it can do to help you](#).

Read what the [government has to say about local air quality](#).

3. Ask for Healthy Air where you live

Advocate for action on air pollution in your area:

Ask your MP for help and monitor what he/she is doing to improve local air quality via [TheyWorkForYou.com](#)

Write to your local authority and say (a) why you are worried about poor air quality; (b) ask what they will do to address your specific

concerns; (c) and ask how and when air quality laws will be complied with in full where you live, work and/or visit.

See example templates at the end of this section for a guide on what to write.

4. Put on a local Healthy Air Campaign event

Raise awareness of air pollution in your community:

Tell your friends, family and colleagues about what you've learnt.

Ask them to write to your local MP and local authority.

Put on a local Healthy Air event – you could use your community centre, village hall, or maybe a local school. Invite your MP and a local authority representative to tell your audience about air

pollution where you live and what's being done about it. Advertise with flyers and posters in your local shop, cafe or pub or at your office or school. Tell your friends on Facebook and Twitter too. You could send out a press release to get a local newspaper interested.

See the end of this section for an example poster, template flyer and press release you could use.



Template letter or email to your MP

Just copy and paste this into a new document, editing the sections in square brackets:

[Your name]

[Your address]

[MP's name]

[MP's address]

[Date]

Dear [MP's NAME]

As a member of your constituency, [CONSTITUENCY NAME], it has come to my attention that air pollution is

<< *OPTION 1* - causing a significant problem for public health in the area. [LOCAL AUTHORITY NAME] has declared an Air Quality Management Area, which means air pollution is exceeding health-based European Union legal standards.>>

<< *OPTION 2* - causing a national public health crisis, and undoubtedly affecting some of your constituents.>>

Nationally, 29,000 premature deaths are attributable to air pollution each year, at 11.5 years early on average. Only smoking causes more premature deaths. The evidence for the severe health impacts of long-term exposure to air pollutants, primarily from road traffic, continues to build. Recent studies suggest exposure can cause asthma in children, permanently reduce lung capacity, and lower new born birth weights.

I am now a supporter of the Healthy Air Campaign, backed by a national coalition of health, environment and transport NGOs that is tackling the public health crisis caused by air pollution.

I'm writing to urge you to both support the campaign yourself (see www.healthyair.org.uk for more information), and to write to the Secretary of State for the Department of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, currently responsible for air quality, to ask the government to do the following:

1. **Fund a national campaign raising public awareness of the impacts of air pollution** on health, the causes and solutions
2. **Launch a cross-department strategy to tackle air pollution** that is led by the Cabinet Office (ensuring action on air pollution is included in all relevant departmental business plans by 2013 and including independently monitored performance measures with incentives and penalties for departments involved)
3. **Introduce a national framework for Low Emission Zones**, providing local authorities with the support (both funding and through policy guidance) to establish LEZs in urban areas by 2014.
4. **Fund further research into the health impacts of air pollution** through an appropriate body such as COMEAP (Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution).
5. **Immediately cease all activities seeking to postpone or delay action on meeting legally binding EU air quality standards**, or attempting to weaken those standards in the run up to and during the 2013 European Year of Air.

A 2011 Environmental Audit Select Committee report was highly critical of the government's track record of action on air pollution so far (see <http://www.parliament.uk/eacom>). Air pollution is an invisible killer and urgently needs action from government.

<< *OPTION 3* - Finally, I would also like to invite you to attend an event being organised to raise awareness of air pollution in [CONSTITUENCY NAME AND EVENT DETAILS HERE]. I do hope you will be able to attend.>>

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]



Template Press Release

Copy and paste this into a new document, editing the sections in square brackets, and send to your local newspaper:

[DATE]: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Residents of [TOWN/COUNTY/BOROUGH] demand Healthy Air

Air pollution is causing a public health crisis in the UK, and is impacting residents of [TOWN/COUNTY/BOROUGH] say local Healthy Air campaigners.

[LOCAL AUTHORITY NAME] has declared an Air Quality Management Area, which means air pollution within the region exceeds safe legal limits. Concerned residents have set up a Healthy Air Campaign event, to be attended by [MP name, Councillor Name etc] to find out what is being done to tackle air pollution in the area.

Event organiser [YOUR NAME] said, "29,000 premature deaths are attributable to air pollution across the UK every single year. Only smoking causes more early deaths. The pollution made by the traffic on our streets is causing a public health crisis. It's an invisible killer."

The Healthy Air Campaign was set up in 2011 by a coalition of health, environment and transport NGO's to push for action from government to tackle the illegal levels of air pollution in the UK. The campaign is calling for a number of initiatives such as a national network of Low Emission Zones to keep the most polluting vehicles out of town and city centres, and is encouraging people across the UK to set up their own campaigns.

[YOUR NAME] said, "We hope this Healthy Air event will raise awareness of the impact air pollution is having in [TOWN/COUNTY/BOROUGH]. If enough people realise air pollution is a big problem here, the more likely our politicians will take action to cut it."

The Healthy Air event will be held [EVENT DETAILS]

ENDS

More information: [YOUR CONTACT DETAILS]

Notes to editors:

1. The Healthy Air Campaign is tackling the public health crisis caused by air pollution. It is supported by a national coalition of health, environment and transport NGOs including Asthma UK, Clean Air in London, ClientEarth, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Environmental Protection UK, Friends of the Earth, Living Streets and Sustrans. www.healthyair.org.uk

2. [ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR LOCAL CAMPAIGN]

 **Campaign poster**

Copy the image below into a new document, then print and display in the window of your home, school or office:

**Tired of breathing dirty,
polluted air?**

So are we...

Don't hold your breath.

**Support the
healthyair 
campaign**

www.healthyair.org.uk

@HealthyAirUK

 **Campaign flyer**

Copy the image below into a new document, then print and fill in the details by hand:



www.healthyair.org.uk

Tired of breathing dirty, polluted air? Did you know air pollution could be affecting you and your family's health?

Come along to _____

On _____ **At** _____

For a free event about air pollution in

and find out what you can do about it.



Further resources:

The Healthy Air Campaign:

www.healthyair.org.uk | Twitter @HealthyAirUK

(links to all campaign partner websites can be found on the Healthy Air website)

Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution (COMEAP):

<http://comeap.org.uk/>

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/air/air-quality/>

(includes links to Local Authorities that have declared Air Quality Management Areas)

Environmental Protection UK:

www.environmental-protection.org.uk

Environmental Audit Committee. Air Quality: A follow up report:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/air-quality-a-follow-up-report/>

Fummifugium MM!:

<http://issuu.com/environmental-protection-uk/docs/fummifugium>

London Air Quality Network:

www.londonair.org.uk

Schools near busiest roads in London:

<http://www.jennyforlondon.org/schools/>

Transport for London: Low Emission Zone:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/lez/default.aspx>

What do they know? Freedom of Information requests:

<http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/>

World Health Organisation (plus, 2008 update on WHO air quality guidelines)

http://www.who.int/topics/air_pollution/en

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/943153q7637737t0/fulltext.pdf>

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Environmental Protection UK would like to thank all Healthy Air Campaign partners for guidance, support and additional material in this pack.

The Healthy Air Campaign is tackling the public health crisis caused by air pollution. We aim to encourage behaviour that helps cut air pollution and exposure to it and persuade the government to take action so the UK fully complies with air quality laws.

www.healthyair.org.uk

The Healthy Air Campaign is supported by:

