

6 September 2012

‘Clean Air in London’ calls for Paralympics organisers to consider delaying the marathon events until Monday or bringing them forward to Saturday to avoid smog

On Thursday 6 September, the Met Office published its five day weather forecast for London which included ‘Moderate’ 6/10 air pollution for the Olympic Park on Sunday. 7/10 would be considered ‘High’.

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/forecast/london-olympic-park-north>

The Met Office expects ‘Moderate’ 5/10 air pollution and 26 degrees in central London during the men’s and women’s T54 marathon.

In contrast, the Government’s air pollution website published the following forecast on Thursday 6 September:

“Air pollution is expected to remain Low in all areas for the next 24 hours as a period of sunny mild and blustery weather sourced from the North Atlantic affects the UK.

“The situation is expected to remain unchanged for the following 3 days.

“Forecast valid until 7th September 2012.”

Later on Thursday the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) shortened its forecast to “the following 2 days” and then tweeted at 5pm “Moderate pollution measured in Greater London”.

Simon Birkett, Founder and Director of Clean Air in London (CAL) (www.cleanairinlondon.org), said: “The Government has failed to forecast three smog episodes during the Olympics and Paralympics and then failed to warn the public when they were underway.

“A Freedom of Information request to the Government about the worst summer smog since 2006 that occurred on the eve of the Olympics Opening Ceremony has found that Defra:

- failed to predict ‘High’ air pollution until less than four hours before an Information Threshold triggered a Pollution Episode Warning (PEW) under UK and European law; and then
- failed to warn the public. Its only attempt to warn anyone was to post a PEW passively on its website and ‘contact’ three other Government departments and the Mayor’s office.

“After the Government’s failings, we are fortunate the Met Office has given us warning of smog on Sunday and top scientists have previously warned that endurance athletes are those most likely to be affected by summer smog.

“The Paralympics organisers should consider delaying the Paralympics marathon events until Monday or bringing them forward to Saturday when conditions are expected to be much better.”