



Questions and Answers on New Air Quality Rules

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Why do EU rules on air quality need to be modernised, and why now?

About **300 000 premature deaths** per year and a significant number of non-communicable **diseases such as asthma, cardiovascular problems and lung cancer** are attributed to air pollution. Air pollution continues to be the number one environmental cause of early death in the EU. In this regard, the worst pollutants are particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide and ozone.

While air pollution affects all of us, it has the biggest impact on the **most vulnerable and sensitive groups of society**: children, people with medical conditions, older persons, and those living in poorer socio-economic conditions as they often live in areas with higher levels of air pollution.

In addition, air pollution **threatens the environment** through acidification, eutrophication, and ozone damage, causing damage to forests, ecosystems and crops. When ecosystems already suffer from excessive nitrogen levels in water, nitrogen deposition from air adds further pollution. Today, eutrophication exceeds critical loads in two thirds of ecosystem areas across the EU. This has a significant impact on biodiversity and the services it delivers for us all.

The last update to the Ambient Air Quality Directives dates back to 2008. Since then, **new scientific evidence** about the health impacts of air pollution has become available. The revised [WHO Air Quality Guidelines](#) published in September 2021 recommend introducing stricter air quality standards.

The evaluation ([fitness check](#)) of the Ambient Air Quality Directives showed that the current Directives helped to reduce air pollution. Compared to the 1990s, there are about 70% fewer early deaths attributable to air pollution. But Europe's air is still too polluted, to the detriment of our health and environment.

What are the main changes proposed and how will they improve air quality?

Together with other EU policies, the proposed directive will **reduce the number of premature deaths** attributable to the main air pollutant - fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) - by more than 75% in ten years. It will also reduce the **amount and gravity of diseases** that are caused or made worse by air pollution, such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. This will particularly benefit the most sensitive and vulnerable populations.

The proposed revision will set **interim 2030 EU air quality standards**, aligned more closely with WHO recommendations, while putting the EU on a trajectory to achieve zero pollution for air at the latest by 2050, in synergy with climate-neutrality efforts. To this end, we propose a regular review of the air quality standards to reassess them in line with latest scientific evidence as well as societal and technological developments. The first review will take place by the end of 2028, with the objective in particular to ensuring full alignment with WHO recommendations.

For instance, the annual limit value for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) will be reduced by more than half in 2030, from 25 µg/m³ to 10 µg/m³ in 2030.

The revision will ensure that **people suffering health damages from air pollution have the right to be compensated** in the case of a violation of EU air quality rules. They will also have the right to be represented by non-governmental organisations through **collective actions for damage compensation**. The proposal will also bring more clarity on **access to justice**, effective **penalties**, and better **public information** on air quality.

Improved rules on **air quality monitoring and modelling** will make it possible to check compliance with standards more closely, also at lower concentrations levels now known to be harmful too, and support more efficient and effective action to prevent and address breaches of standards.

The proposed legislation will better **support local authorities in achieving cleaner air**. In addition

to addressing exceedances of air quality standards, the proposal requires preventive air quality plans when there is a risk of exceeding a limit value in 2030.

The revision will also streamline and simplify the current laws, merging the current two air quality directives into one.

The proposal will not prescribe specific measures to be taken, it sets air quality standards to be achieved everywhere. Member States will continue to be responsible for choosing the most appropriate measures to achieve air quality standards and adapting these to national and local circumstances.

What are the costs of air pollution to society and what will be the benefits of the revision?

In total, the impacts of air pollution cost society an **estimated €231 to 853 billion per year**, including €8 billion for lost workdays alone. The EU economy is also directly affected, with damage to buildings, ecosystems, crop yields and forests also running into tens of billions per year.

Overall, the costs for achieving the new standards are expected to remain well below 0.1% of GDP, and the benefits to economy and society outweigh the costs by at least a factor of 7. Important co-benefits from other policies such as climate action will substantially lower the cost of improving air quality. Industry output and crop production are expected to increase, while costs for respecting the new standards are expected to decrease over time.

By 2030, **total gross benefits for society are estimated at €42 to 121 billion per year, compared to a total cost of €5.7 billion per year** for mitigation measures and related administrative costs.

How did the Commission define the 2030 standards?

The standards proposed for 2030 are **based on an assessment of health impacts, technical feasibility and socioeconomic impacts**. They take into account the contributions of related existing and proposed new policies, such as on climate, energy, transport and environment, notably the [Fit for 55](#) climate package with its actions on energy efficiency and renewable energy, [RePowerEU](#), the [Methane Strategy](#), the [Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy](#), the [Biodiversity Strategy](#) and the [Farm to Fork initiative](#). Furthermore, reductions of vehicle emissions are expected to result from the implementation of new vehicle emission standards, where the Commission is currently working on new proposals.

What are the international implications of the revision and how is the EU working to improve air quality internationally?

By raising its own air quality standards shortly after the revised WHO standards, the EU leads by example. The EU will continue to promote clean air policy internationally, both via bilateral and multilateral action. This includes the neighbourhood policy, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Air Convention, strategic partnerships around the world and in international fora and organisations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Arctic Council. The EU provides capacity-building support, shares know-how and promotes stricter rules and more ambitious clean air commitments.

Notably, the EU plays an important role in the UNECE Air Convention, the most advanced international legal framework on clean air issues. The EU and all Member States are parties to the Convention and the EU is party to all its latest protocols, such as the Gothenburg Protocol that set emission ceilings.

Air pollution from EU sources also impacts air quality in neighbouring regions. A more ambitious Ambient Air Quality Directive will not only ensure cleaner air within the EU but also contribute to less air pollution in other regions.

Overall economic benefits of the revision will support competitiveness of the EU economy, such as through reduced healthcare costs, less workdays lost and less damage to crops, forests and buildings. In addition, cleaner air will contribute to making European cities a more attractive place to live and do business.

For More Information

[Press release](#)

[Questions and Answers on new EU rules on surface water and groundwater pollution](#)

[Questions and Answers on the Review of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive](#)

[Factsheet on the Revision of EU Ambient Air Quality Legislation](#)

[Proposal on a revision of Air Quality Legislation](#)

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