

16 June 2008

Leading NGOs call for Government commitment to comply fully with Air Quality Laws

Campaign for Clean Air in London calls on Mayor Johnson to make a similar commitment and support the NGOs' letter to the Prime Minister

Today, the Campaign for Clean Air in London (CCAL) joined 10 leading environmental and health based organisations (NGOs) in writing to the Prime Minister urging a Government commitment to comply fully with the European Union Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (the new AQ Directive) which entered into force on 11 June 2008.

CCAL has written today to Mayor Johnson also inviting him to make a similar commitment to ensure full compliance with air quality laws in London and to make a public statement in support of the NGOs' letter to the Prime Minister.

Text of the Letter to the Prime Minister

“Dear Prime Minister

The provision of a healthy environment is one of the Government's greatest responsibilities to protect citizens. Despite this, levels of air pollutants in many parts of the UK are substantially in breach of the health and ecosystem standards set in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and are currently expected to remain so for some time.

We, the undersigned, believe that the recent approval of the new European Union Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe gives you the opportunity to make a clear and unequivocal public commitment that the Government will ensure full United Kingdom (UK) compliance with it.

We urge you to consider going further by committing the Government to improving human health and protecting biodiversity, the environment and historical sites by complying with laws concerning emissions to air generally: whether for the purpose of fighting climate change; improving air quality or otherwise. If the UK does not meet its short-term obligations for air quality, what chance is there that it will meet five-year carbon budgets and longer-term commitments introduced in the Climate Change Bill?

An unambiguous commitment now from the Government backed thereafter by prompt and meaningful action will give stakeholders of all types, whether from business, the non-governmental sector or citizens generally, the certainty and time necessary to play their full part in delivering the required changes in the most cost effective manner.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Asthma UK

The British Medical Association Campaign for Better Transport Campaign for Clean Air in London

The Environmental Industries Commission
Environmental Protection UK Green Alliance
The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland
Sustrans
The UK Public Health Association
WWF-UK

Quote from the Campaign for Clean Air in London:

Simon Birkett, Principal Contact of the Campaign for Clean Air in London, said:

"The new European Union Directive on air quality sets a robust framework to move Europe towards meeting World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended standards of air quality.

"The Directive would not be needed if the UK Government had shown the political will necessary to achieve, on its own, WHO recommended air quality standards and comply with earlier, similar, Directives going back to 1999.

"With the Government in 'denial' about the UK's serious air quality problems, Londoners and others will depend on the European Commission enforcing rigorously the new air quality laws.

"London will depend too on Mayor Johnson showing soon how he will improve urgently London's air quality. CCAL has therefore invited Mayor Johnson to make a similar commitment to ensure full compliance with air quality laws in London and to make a public statement in support of the NGOs' letter to the Prime Minister."

Contact:

Campaign for Clean Air in London

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Notes for Editors:

1. The purpose of the cross-party Campaign for Clean Air in London is to achieve urgently and sustainably at least World Health Organisation recommended standards of air quality throughout London. See www.cleanairinlondon.org
2. The new EU Directive came into force on 11 June 2008. It will merge and streamline four existing EU directives and a Council Decision in a single text to become Europe's main air quality legislation for 12 regulated pollutants including nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), ground-level ozone (O₃), particulate matter (PM₁₀) and sulphur dioxide (SO₂) while setting new objectives for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). It will modernise reporting provisions and provide a framework to address breaches of air quality laws that have taken place since 2005, which were set in legislation in 1999, for which no time extensions were allowed.

3. Air pollution has impacts on human health ranging from minor effects on the respiratory system to reduced lung function, asthma, chronic bronchitis, cardiovascular disease and reduced life expectancy. Air pollution in the EU, most notably from fine particulate matter and ground-level ozone, causes the premature death of almost 370,000 citizens every year, reducing average life expectancy by an average of nine months.
4. Local Authorities are required to periodically assess air quality in their areas and declare 'Air Quality Management Areas' where levels of certain pollutants are found to be above EU and UK limits. Currently 218 local authorities have declared an Air Quality Management Area for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), Particulate Matter (PM₁₀) or Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂). A full list is available at the link below:

www.airquality.co.uk/archive/laqm/list.php