

16 January 2012

Top lung scientists have warned a “Summer Smog” could affect Olympic athletes in London

Levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) in London are comparable with those in Beijing before it acted to ensure the success of the 2008 Olympics

Mayor must take action so London leads the world in tackling air pollution as it did after the Great Smog of 1952

Simon Birkett, Founder and Director of Clean Air in London, said:

“Top UK lung scientists are warning that a “Summer Smog”, like August 2003 or July 2006, could affect Olympic athletes in London this summer.

“If we have still hot days, long distance athletes, like marathon runners and cyclists who breathe very hard, could feel a tightness in their chest or experience ‘coughs, breathlessness or other problems’. Those with asthma may need medication. Athletic performance could be affected.

“It’s not just about Olympic athletes though. In the “Summer Smog” of 2003, the Government estimated 46 to 212 early deaths in London attributable to ozone and 85 attributable to short-term exposure to dangerous airborne particles (PM₁₀).

“Beijing has much higher levels of airborne particles than London but London has the highest levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) of all 27 capital cities in Europe and levels comparable with those in Beijing before it took action to ensure the success of the 2008 Olympics.

“In the past, some cities like Beijing and Athens have used an ‘odd and even’ number plate ban to reduce harmful traffic emissions. Others, like Sydney have used the ‘Big Scare’ tactic which plays ‘mind games’ with drivers to keep them away from traffic ‘hotspots’.

“Surely London can do better than that. The Mayor should ban the most polluting diesel vehicles from the most polluted parts of London during the Games and keep an inner scheme in place as a legacy. The longer he delays, the more disruption he’ll cause. At this late stage, it looks like that or a last minute ‘odd and even’ number plate ban.

“Six hundred of the biggest retailers and property owners in the West End are calling for a stricter vehicle emission zone in central London by May 2013 for vehicles over 3.5 tonnes. It is beginning to look like the Mayor is the only obstacle to action.

“We were promised the greenest Games ever. London should deliver it by leading the world in tackling air pollution as we did after the Great Smog of 1952.”

The Independent

Polluted air 'puts Olympic athletes at risk' (16 January 2012)

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change/polluted-air-puts-olympic-athletes-at-risk-6290216.html>

Evening Standard

Retailers back stricter emission zone (16 January 2012)

<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-24028065-retailers-back-stricter-emission-zone.do>

Clean Air in London articles

1. London 2012: No air quality plans to be the greenest Games ever (17 January 2008)
<http://cleanairinlondon.org/olympics/london-2012-greenest-games-ever-or-most-sustainable-ever-breaches-of-air-quality-laws-with-eu-and-ioc-legal-action/>
2. A warning to London 2012 Olympics as Defra issues its 'First "Summer smog" of 2009 alert' with research highlight the number of premature deaths during August 2003 smog 'event' (2 June 2009)
<http://cleanairinlondon.org/olympics/a-warning-for-the-london-2012-olympics-as-defra-issues-first-summer-smog-of-2009-alert/>
3. Consultation shows Olympic Transport Plan would lead to breaches of air pollution laws (11 April 2011)
<http://cleanairinlondon.org/olympics/olympic-transport-plan-would-lead-to-breaches-of-air-pollution-laws/>
4. Plans for Olympic Route Network and Paralympic Route Network remain unlawful and vulnerable to legal challenge through judicial review (12 September 2011)
<http://cleanairinlondon.org/olympics/plans-for-the-olympic-route-network-remain-unlawful-and-vulnerable-to-legal-challenge-through-judicial-review/>