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London must lead the world in 2012 in tackling air pollution

How bad is air pollution in London?

- London has the highest levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution of any capital city in Europe with levels comparable to Beijing, China. Concentrations of dangerous airborne particles (PM₁₀) also breach legal limits in several parts of the city
- Government estimates that some 700,000 Londoners were exposed to unlawful levels of NO₂ in 2010
- Visitors to London arrive in some of the most polluted parts of the city. For example, this year concentrations of NO₂ in Euston Road near the Eurostar terminal have been well over twice legal limits and World Health Organisation guidelines

What are the health impacts of air pollution in London?

- Poor air quality has a significant impact on the health of London residents. The Mayor published a study in 2010 estimating 4,267 premature deaths in London in 2008 attributable to long term exposure to polluted air. These occur mostly as heart attacks and strokes. Only smoking causes more early deaths
- Children, the elderly and people with existing respiratory illness suffer disproportionately from the effects of air pollution. Some 1,148 schools in London are within 150 metres of the city's busiest and most polluted roads (i.e. those that carry over 10,000 vehicles a day). Traffic pollution from such roads may be responsible for 15-30% of all new cases of asthma in children

Is the health of Londoners and visitors affected?

- People may experience health problems with only short term exposure to air pollution particularly if they have existing respiratory conditions such as asthma
- London suffers smog 'episodes' where concentrations of air pollutants can build to moderate, high or very high levels. Scientists have warned that in another smog episode like 2003 or 2006 people could experience pain and shortness of breath and endurance athletes may not perform to the best of their ability
- The Mayor has refused to publicise smog episodes and the Government says it will only issue a press release once a year when ozone is high on its monitoring network

Are there air pollution standards that London should be meeting?

- Legally binding, health based limits for several air pollutants, have been set by the European Union since 1999. London is failing to meet these for PM₁₀ and NO₂
- For PM₁₀ London was required to meet limits by 2005 but unlawfully gained a time extension in 2011 to comply. This time extension has now expired but London has continued to exceed PM₁₀ limits known as 'Bad Air Days'

- NO₂ limits should have been met by 2010. The UK Government has stated that they won't be met until 2025 and is seeking to weaken NO₂ laws
- The European Commission is due to take a decision imminently on legal action
- The UK's leaders repeatedly promised London 2012 would be the 'greenest Games ever' but for air pollution this is not yet the case

What are the authorities in London doing to reduce air pollution?

- The Mayor of London's Air Quality Strategy is not 'fit for purpose'. The Mayor is also using Pollution Suppressor vehicles near air quality monitoring stations most-used to warn the public of smog episodes and report legal breaches. By contrast, prior to the 2008 Beijing Games, the Chinese authorities spent ¥60 billion (£6 billion) on long term measures to reduce air pollution
- Diesel engine exhaust, recently classified by the World Health Organisation as carcinogenic to humans, is a particular problem in London which has some 8,500 diesel buses, over 20,000 diesel taxis and a low emission zone that is two steps and two and a half years behind the equivalent in Berlin
- London needs at least a 30% fall in 'normal' traffic during the Olympics in order to accommodate extra Games traffic and the Olympic Route Network and avoid increases in road congestion and pollution. In Athens (2004) 'odd and even' number plate bans for private cars were introduced. Beijing (2008) also used such bans and introduced additional controls on high pollution vehicles and heavy industry. By contrast London is relying on appeals to drivers and the 'Big Scare' tactic to reduce journeys. Unlike 'hard' measures there are no guarantees that the Mayor's tactics will work and there is no clear 'legacy' for London (such as a Berlin-style inner low emission zone)
- In December 1952 London suffered the Great Smog due to coal smoke, which killed over 4,000 people. In response, tough new smoke control laws were put in place which helped London lead the world for the control of air pollution. Since then successive UK Governments and the city's authorities have become complacent despite scientists warning of new public health risks such those from traffic pollution

The Olympics must be the catalyst for London once again to lead the world in tackling air pollution

Supporting links and contacts

Air quality in London

- CAL [Introduction to air pollution](#) in London
- CAL research on air pollution in [London compared to other European cities](#)
- CAL research on air pollution in [Beijing compared to London](#) and measures taken by the Chinese authorities prior to the 2008 Games
- Air quality monitoring at Euston Road (close to the St. Pancras Eurostar terminal) <http://tinyurl.com/d4g9wdn>

The long term impacts of air pollution

- CAL's article on the Mayor of London's [air pollution and health study](#)
- CAL's research on [schools near major roads](#) in London
- COMEAP (UK Government's advisory body) report on the long term impacts of air pollution - <http://tinyurl.com/6ydsrab>

Short term air pollution episodes and health impacts

- London Air Quality Network [reports on smog episodes](#)
- UK Government reports on air pollution episodes (<http://tinyurl.com/cnfnfpr>):
 - 2011 - <http://tinyurl.com/br67rgo>
 - 2006 - <http://tinyurl.com/ct6e3rr>
 - 2003 - <http://tinyurl.com/clr5fzk>
- Article from the Independent newspaper on the effects of air pollution on athletes, quoting air pollution and health expert Professor Frank Kelly (Kings College, London) - <http://tinyurl.com/czqrgyz>

Air quality standards

- CAL article on Olympic Route Network set to cause [breaches of air pollution laws](#)
- CAL article on London's [unlawful time extension](#) for PM₁₀
- CAL article and complaint on [NO₂ standards not to be met until 2025](#)
- CAL article on '[greenest ever Games](#)' claims

Air pollution actions in London

- CAL research on measures taken by the [Chinese authorities](#) prior to the 2008 Games
- Using the 'Big scare' tactic to deter drivers and others - <http://tinyurl.com/753ty8n>
- Guardian newspaper article on transport during the Games quoting Transport Commissioner Peter Hendy - <http://tinyurl.com/cjal2mq>
- UK Met Office article on the Great Smog of 1952 - <http://tinyurl.com/cj6wgt4>

[Contact Clean Air in London](#)