

25 July 2012

Government issues ‘Pollution Episode Warning’ as ozone in North Kensington, London, breaches ‘Public information threshold’ under UK and European law

Adults and children with lung problems, and adults with heart problems, and the general public may wish to check health advice provided by airTEXT and the London Air Quality Network

‘Clean Air in London’ calls on the Mayor to take a personal lead in ensuring athletes, visitors and Londoners affected by air pollution are properly warned and advised

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has issued a ‘Pollution Episode Warning’ after ozone levels in North Kensington, London, breached the ‘Ozone Public information threshold’ set by UK and European air pollution law. The Warning was timed at 1650 hours GMT on 25 July 2012.

At lunchtime, Defra issued its ‘Latest UK Air Pollution Forecast’ which stated:

‘Air pollution is expected to be HIGH (index 7) at some background locations across London and the south east of England for the next 24 hours as current weather conditions affect the UK.

‘The main pollutant of concern is ground level ozone as a result of the warm and sunny weather which favour the formation of secondary ozone in the atmosphere.

‘The situation is expected to remain unchanged until Thursday evening.’

At ‘High’ 7/10, the Government’s health advice includes:

At-risk individuals:

*‘Adults and children with lung problems, and adults with heart problems, should **reduce** strenuous physical exertion, particularly outdoors, and particularly if they experience symptoms. People with asthma may find they need to use their reliever inhaler more often. Older people should also reduce physical exertion.’*

General population:

*‘Anyone experiencing discomfort such as sore eyes, cough or sore throat should **consider reducing** activity, particularly outdoors.’*

As far as Clean Air in London is aware, this is the first time the Government has been legally required to issue a Pollution Episode Warning for ozone since the Directive for ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe entered into force on 11 June 2008 (Directive 2008/50/EC). The UK’s worst ‘summer smogs’ occurred in August 2003 and June/July 2006.

Quotes

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

“This is the worst ‘summer smog’ for years.

“The Government must ensure people are warned and advised. It must also publish the full forecast information that is included in daily briefings to the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) so that athletes and teams can make their own assessment of potential health risks.

“The Mayor must act personally to protect athletes, visitors and Londoners if the Government continues to fail to do so.”

ENDS

Notes

1. Pollution Episode Warning

<http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/latest/alerts>

2. Legal requirement to issue a Pollution Episode Warning and other actions

Under the Directive for ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (Directive 2008/50/EC) an information threshold ‘shall mean a level beyond which there is a risk to human health from brief exposure for particularly sensitive sections of the population and for which immediate and appropriate information is necessary’. Annex VII on page 32 sets the ‘Information threshold’ at 180 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) which has been breached at North Kensington, London after reaching $190 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:152:0001:0044:EN:PDF>

3. Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs website statement and detailed forecasts

<http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/forecasting/>

<http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/forecasting/summary>

4. London Air Quality Network website, Games venues, health advice, mobile Apps and smog episodes

<http://www.londonair.org.uk/LondonAir/Default.aspx>

<http://www.londonair.org.uk/LondonAir/2012GamesVisitors/Default.aspx>

<http://www.londonair.org.uk/london/asp/airpollutionhealth.asp?HealthPage=HealthAdvice>

<http://www.londonair.org.uk/LondonAir/MobileApps/>

<http://www.londonair.org.uk/london/asp/publicepisodes.asp?region=0>

5. airTEXT website which offers pollution alerts including for the Olympic venues

<http://www.airtext.info/>

<http://www.airtext.info/temp>

6. Met Office weather forecasts for London

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/forecast/?tab=fiveDay>

7. Update of World Health Organisation air quality guidelines dated 29 May 2008

http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/78681/E91399.pdf