

Brussels, 22 March 2022

To: Executive Vice-President Timmermans, Commissioners Sinkevičius and Kyriakides

CC: Members of the College of EU Commissioners

Subject: Call to save lives and protect nature from air pollution with science-based revised EU air quality standards

Dear Executive Vice-President Timmermans,

Dear Commissioners Sinkevičius and Kyriakides,

Today marks 6 months since the World Health Organization (WHO), after a systematic review of the science, [published](#) new Global Air Quality Guidelines with health-based recommendations for maximum concentrations of the major air pollutants.

Air pollution is Europe's largest environmental risk to health, leading to an estimated 400,000 premature deaths annually. It is also the second leading cause of death from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) after tobacco smoking, according to WHO. Ninety-seven percent of the urban population in the EU currently lives in areas with poor air quality.

Air pollution is also a major concern for nature protection. In its Inception Impact Assessment, the Commission [highlighted](#) estimates of up to 54 billion EUR per year in costs of ecosystem impacts of air pollution. According to the assessment, eutrophication limits are being exceeded in 62% of ecosystem areas and in 73% of Natura 2000 areas across the EU territory.

The cost of air pollution is estimated to be up to 940 billion annually for the EU. This includes health costs related to premature death and diseases from air pollution, productivity losses due to both workdays lost and reduction in workers' productivity, crop yield losses, the deterioration of the natural landscape affecting the tourism sector, and damage to buildings.

The unacceptably high health and environmental burden from air pollution is largely preventable.

In the context of a pandemic of unprecedented nature, today's times call for a determined focus on health protection and the prevention of disease. At EU level, the revision of the EU's Ambient Air Quality Directive, which sets clean air standards, is foreseen for autumn 2022. In this crucial update for public health, **the Commission has a unique opportunity to save lives and prevent disease** on an unprecedented scale.

The new WHO recommendations now suggest **considerably lower maximum concentrations** for the main pollutants, most notably for particulate matter with diameter < 2.5 µm (PM2.5), which causes the greatest health burden in the EU, for which an annual concentration of 5 µg/m³ is now recommended, which is a

half of the previous WHO recommendation of 10 µg/m³, and five times lower than the EU's current standard of 25µg/m³. For nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which has come under intense scrutiny in discussions on road transport and inner-city driving bans, a new annual concentration of 10 µg/m³ is now recommended, a significant decrease from previous WHO recommendation of 40 µg/m³, which is also the current EU standard.

The below listed 35+ medical, health, environmental, public health civil society organisations call on you and your services to protect people's health from air pollution, especially that of vulnerable groups such as children or patients already suffering from disease: **in the upcoming revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directive, please come forward with a proposal to introduce binding EU clean air standards to fully meet WHO air quality recommendations by 2030 at the latest.**

The longer the gap between science and regulation remains open, the longer the EU will continue to fail to prevent premature deaths and air pollution related disease. The urgency to act is clear and loud.

Yours sincerely,

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Marko Reinikainen, Director - Air pollution and climate secretariat (Airclim), Sweden

Dr. Aleksandar Simidchiev, Chairman - Air4Health Association, Bulgaria

Sibylle Reichert, Executive Director - Association Internationale de la Mutualité (AIM)

Dr Wendy Yared, Executive Director - Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

Raf Pauly, Director - BRAL - citizens action Brussels, Belgium

Miroslav Šuta, M. D., Chairman - Center for Environment and Health (CpŽPZ), Czech Republic

Ragnhild Sørensen, Communication Officer - Changing Cities e.V., Germany

Anna Gerometta, Presidente - Cittadini per l'aria onlus, Italy

András Lukács, President - Clean Air Action Group, Hungary

Simon Birkett, Founder and Director - Clean Air in London, UK

Barbara Stoll, Director - Clean Cities Campaign

Ugo Taddei, Director of Nature and Health - ClientEarth

Carmen Duce, coordinadora área de transporte - Ecologistas en Acción, Spain

Jürgen Resch, CEO - Environmental Action Germany (Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V.), Germany

Ivaylo Hlebarov, Clean Air Team Leader - Environmental Association Za Zemiata/FoE Bulgaria

Patrick ten Brink, Deputy Secretary General and Director of EU Policy - European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Susanna Palkonen, Director - EFA - European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations

Kjeld Hansen, Chair - European Lung Foundation (ELF)

Dr Milka Sokolović, Director General - European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

Zorana J. Andersen, Chair of the ERS Environment and Health Committee - European Respiratory Society

Georges Cingal, Secrétaire général - Fédération SEPANSO Aquitaine, France

Wojciech Szymalski, President - Foundation Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD), Poland

Arnaud Schwartz, President - France Nature Environnement (FNE), France

Dr. Martin Herrmann, Chairman - German Alliance on Climate Change and Health (KLUG), Germany

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