

1 June 2009

A warning for the London 2012 Olympics as Defra issues ‘First “summer smog” of 2009 alert’ with research highlighting premature deaths during August 2003 smog ‘event’

Air Pollution Bandings and Index need to align to current World Health Organisation recommendations and European Union air quality obligations

‘Clean Air in London’ calls on the Department of Health to update its ‘10 year old’ system of smog alerts to ensure they are more understandable

Defra press release web link

First “summer smog” of 2009 warning:

Link not available

Quotes:

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

“The Campaign for Clean Air in London is pleased that the government is continuing its earlier practise of issuing summer smog alerts when air quality is poor.

“CCAL wrote to Lord Hunt earlier this year after no alert was issued during a worse still summer smog which occurred during the G20 meetings in London in April.

“In that letter CCAL urged the government to continue issuing smog alerts when necessary and to update its alert bandings. The current Air Pollution Bandings and Index (API) system was developed by the Committee on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) in 1998 and reviewed in 1999/2000. In CCAL’s view, the API is hopelessly out-of-date since air pollution can remain in the Low band all year but still breach legal standards for dangerous airborne particles (in force since January 2005) and nitrogen dioxide (in force from January 2010). This is a very confusing message for the public.

“Clean Air in London welcomes the government’s openness in today’s announcement which attaches a research report showing that during London’s summer smog episode in August 2003 there were a total of between 46 and 212 premature deaths from ozone and 85 from dangerous airborne particles. See:

http://www.airquality.co.uk/reports/cat09/0401130931_heatwave2003.pdf

“London’s summer smog episode in July 2006 was likely to have resulted in a similar or greater number of premature deaths from ozone and a slightly lower number for dangerous airborne particles.*

“Defra’s announcement is a timely reminder of the importance of complying fully with European Union air quality laws and of the amount that needs to be done quickly to improve air quality by the

time of the London 2012 Olympics.”

* These figures should be updated to take account of the latest medical advice from the European Environment Agency.

Notes:

1. World Health Organisation recommendations

Air quality and health

Background and guideline values (Fact sheet update August 2008)

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs313/en/index.html>

2. Obligations under European Union air quality laws

Air Quality Standards (30 April 2008)

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/quality/standards.htm>

3. UK Air Quality Archive

Air Quality Standards and Objectives (based on EU Limit Values and World Health Organisation recommendations)

<http://www.airquality.co.uk/standards.php#std>

[Air Pollution Bandings and Index and the Impact on the health of people who are sensitive to Air Pollution](#)

<http://www.airquality.co.uk/standards.php#band>

4. Committee on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP)

COMEAP comments on the DETR Air Pollution Information Service – Numerical index and EC alert thresholds (August 2000):

<http://www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/comeap/statementsreports/comeapapinf.pdf>

COMEAP statement on banding of air quality (January 1998):

Link no longer available