

# Mapping the sources and level of air pollution in Europe: Commission publishes new Air Quality Index and Atlas

At the Clean Air Forum taking place today in Paris the Commission and the EU Environment Agency launched a new Air Quality Index which allows citizens to monitor air quality in real time. The Commission also published an Air Quality Atlas, a tool developed by the Commission's Joint Research Centre that maps the origins of fine particulate matter, such as dust, smoke, soot, pollen and soil particles, in EU cities.

The Air Quality Index and the European Air Quality Atlas are two tools that will help to pave the way for targeted measures to improve air quality and raise citizens' awareness of the air quality situation in Europe. Each year, over 400 000 citizens die prematurely in the EU as a result of poor air quality, more than ten times the number of deaths by road traffic accidents. Millions more suffer from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases caused by air pollution.

Karmenu **Vella**, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries: *"Air pollution is an invisible killer, so the Air Quality Index is needed to inform European citizens on the state of the air they breathe in their own neighbourhood. We are working with cities, regions, countries and industry to tackle the sources of that pollution, which is a cocktail coming from factories, homes and fields, not only from transport."*

**Tibor Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, responsible for the Commission's Joint Research Centre, said: *"In order to tackle air pollution we must first understand where it comes from. The Air Quality Atlas produced by the Joint Research Centre provides essential information on pollution sources for the European cities that are struggling with air quality. It will help cities to design air quality plans which focus on their most polluting activities."*

**The new European Air Quality Index** has a user-friendly interactive map that shows the local air quality situation, based on five key pollutants that harm people's health and the environment: particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), ground-level ozone (O3), nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and sulphur dioxide (SO2). Displaying real-time data for the whole of Europe, the new Index allows citizens to find out how clean the air is that they are breathing. Users can zoom in or search any town or region in Europe to check the local air quality situation.

**The Air Quality Atlas** provides information on the geographical and sectorial sources of air pollution for the 150 biggest cities in Europe. It shows that pollutant emissions in cities originate mainly different human activities;

and that transport, agriculture, industry and residential heating and responsible for the largest part.

## **Background**

The EU Air Quality Directives define and establish standards for ambient air quality for key pollutants which have to be reached by all Member States across their territories. Member States then decide on the means to achieve these standards, but they have to make sure that periods during which they are exceeded are kept as short as possible. The Directives also set common methods and criteria to assess air quality. Member States must report 'up to date' air quality measurements, as well as information on their plans and programmes to meet the standards set out by the Air Quality Directives, to the European Commission and the general public.

The daily and yearly average limits for particulate matter are regularly exceeded in many cities and several regions in Europe. The Air Quality Index and the Air Quality Atlas will help citizens and policymakers to have better understanding of the levels of air quality in their own environments.

While EU air quality policy has brought significant reductions in concentrations of harmful pollutants such as particulate matter, sulphur dioxide (the main cause of acid rain), lead, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and benzene, major problems remain. Fine particulates and ozone, in particular, continue to present significant health risks and safe limits for health are regularly exceeded. EU air quality standards and targets are breached in many regions and cities, and public health suffers accordingly, with rising costs to health care and the economy. The total external health-related costs to society from air pollution are estimated to be in the range of €330-940 billion per year.

### **For more information**

[European Air Quality Index](#)

[European Air Quality Atlas](#)

[Joint Research Centre](#)