

News story: New emission controls will help improve air quality

Restrictions on air pollution from combustion plants and generators were passed by parliament this week, as the government continues to take action against poor air quality.

Air pollution is the biggest environmental risk to public health in the UK, and currently unregulated medium sized combustion plants (MCPs) and generators, commonly used to heat hospitals, hotels, offices, prisons and other large buildings as well as powering some industries, are a significant source of pollution.

A statutory instrument was debated and passed in the house of Commons and House of Lords on Monday and will come into force shortly, implementing a new Medium Combustion Plant Directive.

However, the government is going even further by introducing additional domestic emission controls on generators to tackle pollution from small scale, flexible generators which not covered by the Directive but are highly polluting and have been increasingly used in recent years.

The new regulations are expected to provide 43% of the sulphur dioxide emissions reduction, 9% of the reduction for particulate matter, and 22% of the nitrogen oxides emissions reduction needed to meet the UK's 2030 targets.

Environment Minister Therese Coffey said:

Air pollution has improved significantly since 2010, but we recognise there is more to do which is why we have put in place a £3.5 billion plan to improve air quality and reduce harmful emissions.

These regulations will help deliver further substantial reductions in emissions, while minimising the impact on energy security and costs to businesses. Poor air quality affects public health, the economy, and the environment, which is why we are determined to do more, and later this year we will publish a comprehensive clean air strategy which will set out further steps to tackle air pollution.

These regulations will require new medium combustion plants to reduce emissions from 20 December 2018 and existing medium combustion plants from 2025 or 2030, depending on their size – larger plants must comply sooner than smaller plants.

Additionally, newer generators will need to comply with a nitrogen oxides

emissions limit from 1st January 2019. Older generators, operating prior to December 2016, and those providing certain services to the National Grid will need to comply from a later date, depending on their size, emissions, operating hours, duration of their agreements with National Grid and whether they sign up to new agreements.

Dr Penny Woods, chief executive of the British Lung Foundation, said:

Breathing in toxic pollutants increases all our chances of getting lung cancer, it can worsen symptoms for people who have a lung condition and it can stunt the growth of children's lungs. We therefore welcome these restrictions on generators that will see a reduction in the invisible but deadly pollutants harming our health.

We need action on all sources of pollution, from traffic emissions to generators, if we are truly going to clean up the air in our towns and cities.