

Press release: Government launches world leading plan to tackle air pollution

Environment Secretary Michael Gove today (Monday 14 January) launched an ambitious new strategy to clean up our air and save lives.

Air pollution is one of the biggest threats to public health in the UK – behind only cancer, obesity and heart disease – and the measures set out in the Clean Air Strategy will cut the costs of air pollution to society by £1.7 billion every year by 2020, rising to £5.3 billion every year from 2030.

The UK will set an ambitious, long-term target to reduce people's exposure to particulate matter (PM), which the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified as the most damaging pollutant. To inform development of this new target, the Government will publish evidence early this year on what action would be needed to meet WHO guidelines.

This comes on top of a commitment to halve the number of people living in areas breaching WHO guidelines on PM by 2025. The UK is the first major economy to adopt air quality goals based on WHO recommendations, going far beyond EU requirements.

Launching the Clean Air Strategy, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The evidence is clear. While air quality has improved significantly in recent years, air pollution continues to shorten lives, harm our children and reduce quality of life.

We must take strong, urgent action. Our ambitious strategy includes new targets, new powers for local government and confirms that our forthcoming Environment Bill will include new primary legislation on air quality.

While air pollution may conjure images of traffic jams and exhaust fumes, transport is only one part of the story and the new strategy sets out the important role all of us – across all sectors of work and society – can play in reducing emissions and cleaning up our air to protect our health.

With a commitment to end the sale of conventional new diesel and petrol cars and vans from 2040, the UK is going further than almost every other European nation in tackling emissions from cars. But air pollution does not just come from transport and the Clean Air Strategy sets out a programme of work across government, industry and society to reduce emissions coming from a wide range

of sources.

Following a recent increase in popularity, domestic burning on stoves and open fires is now the single biggest source of particulate matter emissions which is why as part of the new strategy we will:

- introduce new legislation to prohibit the sale of the most polluting fuels
- ensure that only the cleanest stoves are available for sale by 2022
- continue to explore how we can give local authorities powers to increase the rate of upgrades of inefficient and polluting heating appliances
- bring existing smoke control legislation up to date, and make it easier to enforce

We are also taking action to reduce air pollution from agriculture which is responsible for 88% of ammonia emissions by:

- supporting farmers to invest in infrastructure and equipment to reduce emissions
- introducing regulations to require farmers to use low emission farming techniques
- introducing regulations to minimise pollution from fertiliser use

The government will provide farmers with the support they need to make these important changes. In September 2018 the government launched a new £3 million programme through the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) partnership to fund a team of specialists who work with farmers and landowners in priority areas to provide training events, tailored advice, individual farm visits and support with grant applications.

Our Agriculture Bill already sets out how future financial support for the farming sector will be focussed on delivering improvements to the environment. We propose that a future environmental land management system should fund targeted action to protect habitats impacted by ammonia.

Our modern Industrial Strategy is putting the UK at the forefront of low carbon innovation ensuring we seize the opportunity of the global shift to clean growth. As part of this we are supporting investment in innovation to clean up our air. In partnership with UK Research and Investment (UKRI), we have launched a joint research programme worth £19.6 million to promote the development of cleaner technologies funded by the modern Industrial Strategy.

By taking action on air pollution, the Government can help people live well for longer and support the NHS Long Term Plan, which has a greater focus on prevention rather than cure. Revised damage costs for air pollutants, also published today, show the cost to society of air pollution per tonne of emissions is greater than previously thought for some pollutants.

The updated costs reflect our improved understanding of the long-term health impacts of air pollution, incorporating the costs of additional health conditions such heart disease and childhood asthma in addition to the effect of shortening lives, which was already included. This new work means that the

estimated impact of the measures included in the Clean Air Strategy are larger than when the draft strategy was published for consultation last May.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Air pollution is a health issue: it harms the health of the nation. For each of us, our health is unavoidably shaped by the environment we live in. Environmental factors determine around 30% of our healthy life expectancy. Air pollution poses the single greatest environmental threat to human health.

Breathing dirty air is associated with a host of health problems, from asthma to cardiovascular disease and lung cancer, and all too often it is the most vulnerable – children, older people and those from poorer backgrounds – who are hit hardest. In short: clean air helps you live longer.

No-one can tackle air pollution alone so it is a duty of Government to act for us all. We are determined to clean up our environment and are taking the lead with this Clean Air Strategy. We have made strides forward over the past few years and the action we are taking today will save lives and improve the health of the nation – both for those of us here today and for generations to come.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said:

Air pollution kills 7 million people globally every year, making it one of the largest and most urgent threats to global health of our time,

I applaud the United Kingdom's Clean Air Strategy, which will not only help to protect the health of millions of people, but is also an example for the rest of the world to follow.

The government will shortly bring forward an Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill which will include primary legislation on air quality, last updated in the historic Clean Air Act of 1993.