

Press release: New Clean Air Strategy to be launched by Environment Secretary Michael Gove

Later today Environment Secretary Michael Gove will publish a Clean Air Strategy which aims to cut air pollution and save lives, backed up through new primary legislation.

Air pollution is the fourth biggest threat to public health after cancer, obesity and heart disease and the new government strategy sets out how we will go further and faster than the EU in reducing human exposure to particulate matter pollution. Today's proposals are in addition to the government's £3.5 billion plan to reduce air pollution from road transport and diesel vehicles, set out in July last year.

It is estimated that the action set out today will reduce the costs of air pollution to society by an estimated £1 billion every year by 2020, rising to £2.5 billion every year from 2030.

The new strategy, which is now out for consultation, is a key part of our 25 Year Plan to leave our environment in a better state than we found it. It sets out:

- Our goal that by 2025, we will halve the number of people living in locations where concentrations of particulate matter are above the WHO guideline limit of 10 ug/m³ by 2025.
- We will introduce new primary legislation, which will give local government new powers to improve air quality.
- We will legislate to ensure only the cleanest domestic fuels will be available for sale, preventing 8,000 tonnes of harmful particulate matter from entering the atmosphere each year.
- For the first time the government will take concerted action to tackle ammonia from farming – which is responsible for 88% of ammonia emissions – by requiring farmers to invest in the infrastructure and equipment that will reduce emissions. Farmers will be supported to achieve this through our new system of public money for public goods.
- We will work with international partners to research and develop new standards for tyres and brakes to enable us to address toxic non-exhaust emissions of micro plastics from vehicles which can pollute air and water.
- We will provide a personal air quality messaging system to inform the public, particularly those who are vulnerable to air pollution, about the air quality forecast, providing clearer information on air pollution episodes and accessible health advice.
- We will put new investment into scientific research and innovation strengthening the UK's position as a world leader in clean technology and secure further emissions reductions.

During a visit to meet air quality researchers at Imperial College, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Air quality has improved significantly since 2010 but sixty years on from the historic Clean Air Act a clear truth remains – air pollution is making people ill, shortening lives and damaging our economy and environment.

This is why today we are launching this clean air strategy, backed up with new primary legislation. It sets out the comprehensive action required across all parts of government to improve air quality.

The strategy also sets out how we will work with media outlets to improve public access to the air quality forecast and help individuals and organisations reduce their contribution to air pollution; showing how this can help them protect their families, colleagues and neighbours.

The importance of raising awareness of the dangers of air pollution is evident in a research report, also published today, which shows just 1 in 5 respondents felt they knew a lot about its effects. The report also showed a lack of awareness of the wide range of sources of air pollution with most naming transport as the main cause. But transport emissions are only one part of the problem. From farming to cleaning solvents there are a large range of other day to day practices, processes and products that produce harmful emissions.

Of particular concern is burning wood and coal to heat a home which contributes 38% of UK emissions of damaging particulate matter. Cleaner fuels and stoves produce less smoke, less soot and more heat. In future only the cleanest domestic fuels will be available for sale.

Mr Gove added:

Government cannot act alone in tackling air pollution. Our strategy sets out how we will work with businesses, farmers, industry and households to develop innovative new solutions to reduce emissions. It also highlights how we can all take action and playing an important role in cleaning up our air.

Also being announced today, by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, is a new tool for local authorities developed for Public Health England by Imperial College and the UK Health Forum which will enable local authorities to estimate the economic impact of air pollution in their area. The tool takes account of the cumulative cost for diseases where there is a strong association with air pollution: coronary heart disease; stroke; lung cancer; and child asthma.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Jeremy Hunt said:

Air Pollution is contributing to a national health crisis. If we fail to take decisive action, we risk more of our children suffering from asthma, and patients needlessly ending up in hospital.

Our health service can only go so far in treating the conditions that dirty air can contribute to, and we have a responsibility to stop this issue at source. Today's Clean Air Strategy and Air Pollution Tool do just that, taking a giant step towards cleaning up our air for good.