

Task Force meets on transboundary challenges of air pollution

Air quality experts and delegates from around the world are meeting today (11 October) to discuss international collaboration towards preventing and reducing air pollution and improving global air quality.

Hosted in Bristol by the United Kingdom, and jointly organised with co-chair Sweden, the inaugural meeting of the Task Force for the Forum for International Cooperation on Air Pollution (FICAP) will act as a steering committee to plan the first global Forum event, taking place in Sweden in 2023. Over two days, the Task Force is meeting to plan a programme for next year's event.

Air pollution continues to be the greatest environmental risk to human health. It causes a range of life-shortening diseases, drives down productivity, and costs our economies billions every year. In 2018 Public Health England estimated that the costs of air pollution (PM2.5 and NO2) in England to health and social care services could reach between £5.3 and £18.6 billion between 2018 and 2035. Whilst action on emissions in the United Kingdom is vital, pollution from other countries can also have significant effects on domestic air quality.

The Task Force meeting is taking place under the UNECE Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP), established in 1979 to address air pollution and its impacts on the environment and health at an international level.

The forum event in Sweden next year will be the first opportunity for international experts and delegates from Parties to the Convention, non-governmental organisations, and key countries from all regions of the world to come together to share science and policy expertise on global air pollution. While progress on the Forum was paused during the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Kingdom and Sweden are now seeking to reinvigorate international cooperation on improving air quality.

Minister Harrison opened today's session to welcome delegates and set out the importance of working together to tackle air pollution.

Speaking at today's Task Force meeting, Air Quality Minister Trudy Harrison said:

"Air pollution is a transboundary challenge and we need transboundary solutions, by co-operating at an international level.

"If we are to continue achieving the emissions reductions we know are needed to protect our people's health, our economies and our environments, we must find new and innovative solutions on a global scale.

"The United Kingdom is proud to co-chair this new forum for sharing science

and policy expertise internationally, which will help more regions to take steps to tackle air pollution. With hard work and determination, the Forum for International Cooperation on Air Pollution will be a beacon of global environmental leadership and innovation, and I look forward to seeing it go from success to success.”

Members of the Task Force will agree a clear set of areas for greater regional cooperation and a clear design for the full Forum meeting taking place in Sweden in March 2023.

As a founding member of the UNECE Convention, the United Kingdom is at the forefront of international action to tackle transboundary air pollution and has played a leading role in supporting international programmes to drive forward scientific understanding of emissions and their impacts.

The United Kingdom has engaged constructively with the Convention to agree ambitious standards and emission reduction commitments since 1999. The Convention has played an instrumental role in reducing harmful pollutants in both Europe and North America, with sulphur dioxide reducing 70% in Europe between 1990 and 2006 and nitrogen oxide falling 35%.

Air pollution at a national level continues to reduce significantly, with nitrogen oxide levels down by 44% and PM2.5 down 18% since 2010, but we know there is more to do. We have committed nearly £900 million to tackle air pollution and improve public health, and recently consulted on stretching new targets for air quality to be set through the Environment Act.