

## Air pollution from medium combustion plants

Despite improvements in recent decades, air pollution in Europe remains a concern. To address this, in 2013 the European Commission put forward a proposal to limit emissions of air pollutants from medium combustion plants, which are currently not regulated at EU level. First reading negotiations with the Council have delivered a compromise now awaiting a vote in plenary.

### Background

Although air quality has improved considerably in recent decades, the [European Environment Agency](#) indicates that the European Union (EU) is still far from achieving levels that do not result in unacceptable risks to humans and the environment. According to the [European Commission](#), particulate matter (PM) concentrations are responsible for over 400 000 premature deaths annually in the EU, and the total health-related costs of air pollution in the EU are in the range of €330–940 billion per year.

The main legislative instruments on air pollution are the 2001 [National Emission Ceilings Directive](#) (currently under [review](#)) and the 2008 [Ambient Air Quality Directive](#), as well as legislation controlling sources of pollution from road transport, non-road transport and industry. At international level, Member States are bound by the Geneva Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution ([CLRTAP](#)) and its protocols.

### Commission proposal

In December 2013, the Commission presented a 'Clean air policy package' containing among other things a [proposal](#) on medium combustion plants. According to the Commission, the package, drawn up on the basis of consultations and an [impact assessment](#), aims to ensure compliance with existing air quality policies and international commitments by 2020, and to further reduce health and environmental impacts by 2030.

The Commission estimates that there are over 140 000 medium-sized combustion plants in the EU. These plants, with a thermal input of between 1 and 50 MW, are used for various applications (including electricity generation as well as domestic and industrial heating and cooling). Unlike small and large combustion plants, they are not presently covered by EU legislation, although the Commission [indicates](#) that they are causing a worsening of PM emissions due to increased biomass burning under climate and energy policies. The Commission proposed to set emission limit values by fuel type for sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and PM. Limit values would apply one year after transposition for new plants, and as of 2025 or 2030 (depending on plant size) for existing plants, with mitigation measures to limit impacts on SMEs. More stringent limit values would be set in geographical areas not meeting EU air quality standards, while provisions for monitoring requirements and measures for effective implementation and enforcement would also be set out.

Trade bodies, including [Eurelectric](#) and [FuelsEurope](#), underlined the need for flexibility, while [environmental NGOs](#) advocated widening the scope to other pollutants and limiting exemptions.

### Trilogue agreement

The first reading [compromise](#), reached with the Council during interinstitutional negotiations, and endorsed by the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee on 15 July 2015, introduces carbon monoxide monitoring as well as some exemptions. Limit values for existing plants will be less stringent, while those for new plants remain almost as proposed. The compliance dates stay unchanged. In areas not meeting EU air quality standards, national authorities are required to assess whether to introduce stricter limit values, although these are no longer set by the EU.

The [report](#) at first reading, based on the negotiated compromise, is due to be voted in the October I plenary session (rapporteur: Andrzej Grzyb, EPP, Poland).