

Air quality legislation: MEPs strike deal with Council

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Plans for more ambitious national caps on emissions of key pollutants by 2030, including NO_x, particulates and sulphur dioxide, were informally agreed by MEPs and the Dutch presidency of the Council on Thursday. Air pollution causes about 400,000 premature deaths in the EU per year. The agreement now needs to be endorsed by the Environment Committee and Parliament as a whole.

"The evidence on poor air quality is clear - air pollution doesn't stop at member state borders", said lead MEP [Julie Girling](#) (ECR, UK). "I am very pleased to have struck an agreement during the Dutch presidency to reduce health impacts by about 50% by 2030. Ensuring member states are on track to reach their targets is key and I am confident this first reading agreement will contribute to better air quality for citizens across the EU."

"I thank the Dutch presidency and Parliament's negotiating team for their efforts in bridging positions which were initially very far apart", said Environment Committee chairman Giovanni La Via (EPP, IT).

"We are all aware that atmospheric pollutants cause the premature deaths of more than 400,000 people every year in the EU. That is why we, in the Parliament, decided that our level of ambition on NEC should be as high as possible in order to save lives, but we also believe that these measures should remain cost-effective and realistic, and be based on robust scientific evidence", he added.

Emission reduction targets

In an annex, the proposal sets out the national emission reduction commitments for the main pollutants: sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC), ammonia (NH₃), and fine particulates (less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter).

Annex II aims for emission reductions resulting in a 49.6% health improvement, a compromise between Parliament's starting position of 52% and the Council's 48%.

Car emissions

As advocated by MEPs, the agreement includes wording reiterating the EU commitment to identifying and responding to source control legislation that is failing to work, as demonstrated by the discrepancy between real world emissions and NO_x test emissions from EURO 6 diesel cars.

Methane

Member states insisted that methane be excluded from the scope of the directive. However, the Commission confirmed that it could trigger a review on this point.

Next steps

The agreement will be put to a vote in the Environment Committee on 12 July.

Press release

Note to editors

In 2010 air pollution caused over 400,000 premature deaths in the EU and over 62% of EU territory exposed to eutrophication, including 71% of Natura 2000 ecosystems. Its total external costs are in the range of €330-940bn per year, including direct economic damage of €15bn from lost workdays, €4bn healthcare costs, €3bn crop yield loss and €1bn damage to buildings (European Commission figures).

Non-compliance with existing air quality standards and the EU's new international obligations under the Gothenburg Protocol prevent better protection of EU citizens and their environment. Areas not in compliance with PM10 and NO2 standards amount to 32% and 24% of EU territory respectively, and 40m citizens are still exposed to PM10 levels above EU limit values.

Further information

- EP Research: National emissions ceilings directive : <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-565910-Reducing-air-pollution-v3-FINAL.pdf>
- EC Memo: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1274_en.htm
- Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/envi/home.html>

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