

## Air quality: Environment MEPs call for tougher new national caps on pollutants

As air pollution is responsible for around 400,000 premature deaths in the EU yearly, Environment MEPs on Wednesday tightened up Commission plans and called for more ambitious national caps on emissions of six main pollutants, such as sulphur dioxide, particulate matter and nitrogen oxides in order to cut emissions by 70% across the EU and save €40bn in air pollution costs by 2030. MEPs also want to include emissions reduction ceilings on mercury, and a midpoint target for most caps of 2025.

"The new NEC directive is the opportunity to tackle this important health issue, by putting in place the benchmarks for Member States to work towards. We cannot underestimate the benefits that would result from cleaning up the air we breathe," said the rapporteur, Julie Girling (ECR, UK) after her report was adopted by 38 votes to 28, with 2 abstentions.

### More ambitious caps

The committee wants the future national emission ceiling (NEC) directive to include caps on mercury (HG) from 2020, as well as the new caps in all member states on emissions of the air pollutants sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>), and particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) to be achieved by 2020 and 2030, that are proposed by the Commission. The committee stressed that more ambitious targets should be set in order to reach 2030 goals.

### Midpoint targets for 2025

In order to ensure progress towards the goals set for 2030, the environment committee suggests that midpoint emissions targets for 2025 be added to the legislation. The midpoint targets would be fully binding for all pollutants, with the exception of methane.

### No offsets for international shipping

The committee also voted to remove the Commission proposal for flexibility allowing members states to offset reductions in emissions from nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxides and particulate matter from international shipping. Offering maritime offsets would be extremely difficult to apply, and would essentially exclude landlocked countries, the committee believes.

### Next steps

The report will be put to a plenary vote in Strasbourg in October.

### Note to editors

*According to the European Commission, air pollution causes substantial environment and health impacts: in 2010 annual premature mortalities amounted to over 400,000 and 62% of the EU area was exposed to eutrophication, including 71% of Natura 2000 ecosystems. Total health-related external costs are in the range of € 330-940bn per year, including direct economic damages of €15bn from lost workdays, €4bn healthcare costs, €3bn crop yield loss and €1bn damage to buildings.*

*Significant 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 its environment. The number of zones not in compliance with PM10 and NO2 standards amount to 32% and 24%; 40m citizens are still exposed to PM10 levels above the EU limit values.*

### Further information

[Procedure file](#)

[Profile of rapporteur Julie Girling \(ECR, UK\)](#)

[Commission proposal](#)

[Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety](#)

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Tougher new air pollution targets called for EU countries ©BELGAIMAGE/PHOTOSHOT/W.Lili