



European Commission delays air pollution legislation, yet again

[Brussels, 2nd July 2010] – The European Commission yesterday revealed that critical air legislation will be postponed until 2013, putting the health of millions of Europeans at risk. In an interview with *Le Monde*, Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said air policies will not be reviewed until 2013 as they are too costly to implement.

Environmental and health NGOs argue that this is not the case. It has been shown that the benefits to health, the environment and the economy of a revised National Emissions Ceiling Directive (NEC) will significantly outweigh the costs involved [1]. NEC is the cornerstone of EU-wide legislation to protect air quality which was originally intended to be revised in 2005.

Louise Duprez, EEB Air Policy Officer, said: “It is shocking, to say the least, that the European Commission fails to see the importance of protecting our most valuable resource. Through this inaction, it is failing to protect the environment and the health of Europe’s citizens.”

In Europe alone, air pollutants are estimated to cause close to half a million premature deaths each year [2] as well as severe damage to the environment through eutrophication, acidification and ground-level ozone. Air quality limit values are exceeded in most parts of Europe. Without a revision of emissions legislation now, member states will continue breaching EU air quality standards. In order to avoid this, new legislation on overall emissions is needed in addition to the existing standards.

Anne Stauffer, Policy Manager at the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), said: “Commissioner Potočnik’s announcement is particularly bad news for the health of children and those suffering from respiratory diseases. Air pollution is known to increase respiratory problems and diseases, such as asthma [3]. In order to reduce the burden of disease and death caused by air pollution, action is needed now.”

The NGOs add that current EU efforts addressing climate change will benefit from new air legislation as greenhouse gases and air pollutants generally come from the same sources.

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Notes:

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[1] See for instance the cost-benefit analysis published by AEA in 2008 "NEC CBA report #3", available [here on the European Commission website](#)

[2] According to a recent study by the European Topic Centre on Air and Climate Change (ETC/ACC) on behalf of the European Environment Agency (EEA), pollution of fine particles is associated with more than 455,000 premature deaths every year in the EU's 27 member states.

[3] <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environmental-health/air-quality/facts-and-figures>