



PRESS RELEASE

MEPs call for immediate release of air package

Strasbourg, 10 December 2013 - Today fifteen MEPs representing the main political groups from across the political spectrum gathered in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg to call upon the European Commission to propose its air package before the end of the European Year of Air.

The action follows Monday's announcement by a spokesperson for the Environment Commissioner Janez Potocnik about the delayed adoption of the promised air package [1]. Continuous delays means there are now only a few days left to save the face of the so called "European Year of Air" and propose new measures to improve air quality in Europe.

MEPs held a giant inflatable pair of lungs above their heads to symbolise the importance of protecting people's health. They carried a banner saying 'Our lungs are in your hands' addressed to all twenty-eight EU Commissioners [2].

Bas Eickhout MEP said that the air package was long overdue: *"Delays from the European Commission in proposing new laws on air quality are unnecessary and irresponsible. People will shortly ask if this year should have more appropriately have been termed the 'European Year of Hot Air'."*

MEPs were joined by representatives of a large coalition of environment and health NGOs including groups from France, Germany, Spain and the UK [3].

"Each year, air pollution continues to kill more than 400 000 Europeans prematurely and increases our health bills by billions, as well as causing widespread environmental damage" said **Jeremy Wates, Secretary General of the European Environmental Bureau**. *"All of this can be avoided, but it requires as a first step that the Commission stops dragging its feet and comes forward with an ambitious package in the coming days"*.

A study published in The Lancet on Monday [4] once more confirmed that current EU air quality legislation is far from sufficient to protect Europeans' health. The study estimates that for every 5 micrograms per cubic metre increase in annual exposure to fine-particle pollution, the risk of dying rises by 7 per cent.

"In the EU, children would benefit enormously from a stronger policy on air quality. EU research has shown that living near a busy road may be responsible for 15% of asthma in children. Isn't it time to act?" says **Genon Jensen, Executive Director, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)**. *"The total cost of respiratory disease in the EU 28 exceeds a staggering €380 billion, according to today's report from the European Respiratory Society and the European Lung Foundation."* [5]

Air pollution also damages nature and biodiversity by depositing acidifying and eutrophying substances over large areas in Europe and causing them to exceed the critical loads of sensitive ecosystems.

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Editors' notes

[1] The European Commission should be releasing the Air Package on 18 December: <http://europa.eu/newsroom/calendar/event/465063/the-commission-presents-air-quality-package>

[2] Photos of the action: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/europeanenvironmentalbureau/> (available after 11am on 10 December)

[3] NGO priorities for the Year of Air: <http://www.eeb.org/EEB/?LinkServID=42BEBEBD-5056-B741-DBBE1878C116803B>

[4] Lancet study: [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)62158-3/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)62158-3/abstract)

[5] Facts and figures booklet for policy makers on lung health and prevention released by European Respiratory Society (ERS) and the European Lung Foundation (ELF) available at <http://www.erscongress2011.org/>

HEAL is a leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union. With the support of more than 65 organisations, which represent health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts, HEAL brings independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making processes. Members include international and Europe-wide organisations as well as national and local groups. Website: www.env-health.org

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