



Information release

EU decision to allow greater pollution of Polish power plants puts health of citizens at risk

Brussels / Warsaw – 19 February 2014 - Health groups express their concern about the recent decision by the EU Commission to grant Polish power plants more time to reduce emissions of hazardous air pollutants. The Polish government had requested a three year time extension under a so-called Transitional National Plan (TNP), which was given the go ahead by the EU this week (1).

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), fears this exemption will contribute to higher rates of chronic disease such as asthma or heart disease, due to more air pollution from coal power generation (2). Air pollution from power plants increases the background levels of air pollution and leads to a higher number of pollution peak days on which EU air quality standards are being breached.

For Poland, the Plan translates into the release of thousands of tons of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and dust, compared to a scenario without a TNP (3). These additional emissions amount to external health costs of 2.4 to 6.8 billion EUR over the course of three years (4). More importantly, the people in Poland will be paying for these costs through a high rate of heart and lung disease.

This exemption to pollute more will be an even greater strain for Poland's already alarming air pollution situation. Six Polish cities are among the 10 most polluted locations in Europe, where the EU's limits for particulate matter are exceeded on average on one out of three days. (5) It is estimated that up to 86 percent of the Polish population in cities is exposed to dirty air above the EU's air quality standards. (6) Of the 73 power plants listed for exemption to pollute more, 59 are in zones where EU air quality standards are being breached (7).

Julia Huscher, HEAL's Coal and Health Officer says, *"It is hard to understand why the EU Commission approves of a plan that counteracts commitments for cleaner air under the EU's ambient air quality directive. A prompt application of the new emission limit values would have remedied Poland's notorious problem with particulate matter. Instead the EU Commission seems to be siding with the biggest industrial polluters, rather than protecting people's health."*

Dr Piotr Dabrowiecki of the Polish Federation of Asthma, Allergy and COPD Patients adds: *“Based on recent data, we can conclude that air pollution is an extremely heavy burden on society: each year, almost two million people die because of air pollution. High levels of air pollutants cause increasingly bad health for our citizens, reduce employee productivity and increase health care costs”*. (8)

Health and medical experts call on the Polish government to carry out a thorough assessment of what the pollution prolongation means for health as part of the required Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment. Such an assessment will allow a more comprehensive public discussion of the Transitional National Plan (TNP) through public participation.

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Notes

(1) Under the EU’s Industrial Emissions Directive, Member States can apply for exemptions with a TNP. The IED sets stricter binding emission limit values for power plants and other industrial installations compared to the current binding values. The duration of the TNPs is up to 4.5 years, however, the Polish TNP foresees compliance with the IED emission limit values already in 2019, constituting for a total extra time of three years from January 2016, when the IED comes into force, until December 2018. Fifteen EU member states have applied for such an exemption, the EU Commission has already approved seven requests.

(2) A scenario without a TNP but a prompt implementation would lead to quicker cuts in levels of sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxides and dust, and thus a faster lowering of rates of chronic diseases. Many intervention studies have documented the positive effects on health from lowering pollution levels, such as lower mortality rates and lower rates of cardiovascular and respiratory cases and conditions. The WHO REVIHAAP project report (2013) gives an overview of the scientific evidence for the correlation of air pollution levels and disease rates: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/publications/2013/review-of-evidence-on-health-aspects-of-air-pollution-revihaap-project-final-technical-report>

(3) Transitional National Plan of Poland (Przejściowy Plan Krajowy) submitted to the EU Commission on 31.12.2012. The TNP is an option for derogation of emission limit values for large combustion plants set by the Directive 2010/75/EC on industrial emissions (article 32 of the IED).

(4) External cost estimate based on the TNP version of 28.12.2012 and on marginal damage costs per tonne of EEA (2011): Revealing the costs of air pollution from industrial facilities in Europe, Annex 1.

(5) AirBase database version 8, European Environment Agency. <http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/airbase-the-european-air-quality-database-8/>

(6) European Environment Agency (2013): Air quality in Europe – 2013 report.

<http://www.eea.europa.eu/media/newsreleases/air-pollution-still-causing-harm>

The EU Commission has opened an infringement procedure against Poland because they cannot comply with the EU ambient air quality limits.

(7) Directive 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:152:0001:01:EN:HTML)

[lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:152:0001:01:EN:HTML](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:152:0001:01:EN:HTML)

The Directive sets limit values for, among others, particulate matter (PM₁₀), nitrous dioxide and sulphur dioxide - aimed at the protection of human health (annex XI). If limit values are repeatedly exceeded, air quality management plans need to be developed by local authorities that shall contain analysis of the main sources of pollution, measures already undertaken to improve air quality, as well as additional measures foreseen to achieve compliance. However, even air pollution levels consistent with the EU limit values can be dangerous for human health. The limit value for particulate matter PM₁₀ set by directive 2008/50/EC is substantially higher than the value recommended by WHO: 40µg/m³ compared to 20µg/m³ (see reference note 2).

(8) Global premature mortality due to anthropogenic outdoor air pollution and the contribution of past climate change, Silva, west, et al: Environmental Research letters, vol. 8, no. 3, 11 July 2013

<http://iopscience.iop.org/1748-9326/8/3/034005/article>

HEAL is a leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union. With the support of its more than 65 member organizations, 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