

To:
Mr. Janez Potočnik
EU Commissioner for Environment

Cc.:
Catherine Day, Secretary-General of the European Commission
Karl Falkenberg, Director General for Environment

Brussels, 23 April 2012

Re: NGOs call for EU air quality limit values to be enforced by the European Commission

Dear Commissioner Potočnik,

We are writing to you on behalf of over 200 European citizens' organisations from across the EU to ask you to take immediate action against those Member States who are breaching their obligations to comply with the EU's ambient air quality legislation.

Why the enforcement of EU limit values matters

Although emissions of air pollutants have fallen over the past twenty years, the quality of the air we breathe has not significantly improved. Concentrations of ozone and particulate matter (PM), both very dangerous to human health, remain very high, having a significant impact on health and well-being and leading to nearly half a million premature deaths each year in the EU 27 Member States¹.

In comparison with the WHO recommendations for ambient air quality, current EU limits are insufficient to protect people's health, in particular when it comes to the concentrations of the smallest particles. The implementation of the WHO recommended limits for PM2.5 in 25 large European cities alone could provide savings of €31.5 billion annually, including savings on health expenditures, absenteeism and intangible costs such as well-being, life expectancy and quality of life².

Still, EU legislation on ambient air continues to be breached, every day, in many places across the EU. More than seven years after the entry into force of PM10 limits, such breaches are simply unacceptable.

Member states' notifications for a postponement of the NO2 limit value

The Ambient Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC allows Member States to ask for a time extension to comply with the limits for some pollutants, under certain conditions. We are very pleased with the decisions adopted so far by the European Commission, which reflect a thorough technical assessment of Member States' notifications and a strict application of the conditions required for obtaining an extension.

¹ 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.

² See results of EU research project the project APHEKOM:
<http://www.aphekom.org/web/aphekom.org/home.jsessionid=196F85AD90D285D4755D72CAE82EE61>

We would like to encourage you to continue working in this direction, in particular with regards to NO₂ notifications which are currently being assessed by your Directorate General. High concentrations of NO₂ have been shown to have adverse impacts on human health, including damages to the lungs and increased risks of respiratory problems³. We ask you to ensure that the derogations are limited to exceptional situations and only to those Member States who can demonstrate that they have taken all possible measures to comply with the limits. In particular, this should include evidence that a set of ambitious actions aimed at reducing traffic-related emissions in cities have been adopted⁴.

Infringement actions against non-compliant countries

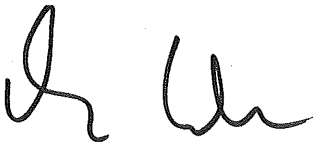
Every day that limit values are exceeded results in more costs for society. It diminishes the quality of the life and health of EU citizens. We therefore see no excuse for Member States to fail to comply with EU standards, especially as the health of EU citizens is at stake, and as those limits were negotiated and endorsed by Member States themselves more than ten years ago.

One of the most effective ways to put an end to this is by enforcing the EU air quality laws as soon as possible. As Commissioner for Environment, you have a vital role to play in making sure that those Member States who are in breach of the Directive are sent to the European Court of Justice without delay.

By doing this, you will stand firm for every European citizen's right to clean air, regardless of where they live in Europe; be it Lisbon, London, or Ljubljana.

We count on your support.

Yours Sincerely,



Jeremy Wates
Secretary General, European Environmental Bureau

On behalf of:

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)
Transport and Environment (T&E)
Client Earth
European Respiratory Society (ERS)
European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA)

³ WHO Air quality guidelines for particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide - Global update 2005 - Summary of risk assessment, Available at: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2006/WHO_SDE_PHE_OEH_06.02_eng.pdf

⁴ For examples of successful measures which can contribute to reducing emissions from traffic, see EEB, T&E and AirClim publication "What can be done in our cities to decrease air pollution", 2011: <http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm/library/index.cfm?firstpublications=2&month=0&year=0&Publications=1>

Air Pollution & Climate Secretariat (AirClim), Sweden
 Bond Beter Leefmilieu Vlaanderen (BBL), Belgium
 Campaign for Clean Air in London, UK
 Center for Environment and Health, Czech Republic
 Clean Air Action Group, Hungary
 Danish Ecocouncil, Denmark
 Deutsche Umwelthilfe, Germany
 Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
 EU Umwelt Büro, Austria
 Fédération Inter-Environnement Wallonie, Belgium
 Finnish Association for Nature Conservation, Finland
 France Nature Environnement, France
 Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), Germany
 Genitori Antismog, Italy
 Ile de France Environment, France
 Institute for Sustainable Development, Slovenia
 Legambiente, Italy
 Milieu Defensie, the Netherlands
 Natuur en Milieu, the Netherlands
 Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU), Germany
 Society for Sustainable Living (SSL), Czech Republic
 Verkehrsclub Deutschland (VCD), Germany
 Zielone Mazowsze, Poland





Campaign for Clean Air in London

