

Letter to Members of the Environment Committee

Concerning: Call for defending existing health standards on air pollution (Krahmer report)

Dear Member of the EP Environment Committee,

CEE bankwatch
network

CAN
Europe



T&E
Europe's voice for sustainable transport



Friends of the Earth Europe

GREENPEACE

I am writing to you on behalf of the seven environmental organisations signing this letter. On 21 June the EP Environment Committee will vote on the Directive on Air Quality and Cleaner Air in Europe – the first legally binding proposal linked to the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution. This proposal is a revision, and so relates to standards which are already in force. We are alarmed that the Committee might support a position that would actually weaken existing levels of health protection.

We most strongly oppose amendments and compromise amendments which would delete or weaken the existing daily limit values for coarse particles (PM₁₀), increase the amount of allowed exceedance days or introduce excessive derogations of ten years. We urge MEPs to prevent this roll-back, not to accept misleading compromises which would weaken existing law and to vote for health-protecting standards for fine particles (PM_{2.5}) equivalent to the latest air quality guidelines of the World Health Organisation, as required by the Sixth Environment Action Programme.

Air pollution is one of the most important environmental and health problems in Europe to date, causing some 370,000 premature deaths, the equivalent of losing virtually the population of Malta every year. It also results in well over 100,000 critical hospital admissions each year for acute heart and respiratory-problems. The annual cost to society of the impact on health from fine particles and ozone is an estimated 3-9% of the EU25 GDP¹. But this figure does not include the pain and suffering of individuals and their families. At the same time many measures to improve urban air quality are not only cost-effective but would also help combat climate change, for example through reducing private car travel, improving energy efficiency and increasing renewable energy use in buildings².

The World Health Organisation clearly states that both short-term and long-term limit values for PM₁₀ are needed. It is now abundantly clear that major adverse effects on health occur even in areas which fall within the current long-term as well as short-term limit values. This is why WHO has recommended further lowering both limit values.

Deleting or weakening existing daily limit values would particularly affect those most vulnerable to air pollution, such as small children, old people and people with respiratory and cardiovascular problems. It would also mean less health protection for people living near busy streets or industrial sites. Excessive derogations would remove the initiative to reduce air pollution.

Many countries have been far too late in adopting measures to meet existing limit values for particles and only started to take measures last year. They delayed implementing effective measures even though they were legally obliged to act before 2005. MEPs should insist that this Directive is implemented effectively and enforced stringently instead of deleting existing limit values.

About a year ago the Commission held a serious internal debate on the future of its environmental policy. Many MEPs were very critical of President Barroso's move to postpone and possibly even cancel adoption of the Air Strategy and its

accompanying Air Quality Directive. This was seen as an attempt to marginalise environmental and health protection in Europe. Finally the Strategy was published indeed, but in a weakened form. The accompanying draft Directive was a step back regarding health and environmental protection, introducing as it did new derogations and exemptions regarding certain pollutants.

We call upon the Committee not to follow in the footsteps of the Commission President, and instead to fight against any further weakening. In particular this means to oppose amendments and compromises which would effectively be a roll-back compared to existing standards. This would send a very negative signal to the European public, who expect the EU to adopt laws that help to protect health and the environment.

John Hontelez, Secretary General European Environmental Bureau

On behalf of:

CEE Bankwatch Network

Climate Action Network Europe

European Environmental Bureau

European Federation for Transport & Environment

European Public Health Alliance – Environment Network

Friends of the Earth Europe

Greenpeace

¹ CAFE CBA: Baseline Analysis 2000 to 2020, Service Contract for Carrying out Cost-Benefit Analysis of Air Quality Related Issues, in particular in the Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) Programme, April 2005, <http://www.cafe-cba.org> .

² The EEA has just highlighted that air pollution and climate policy have mutual benefits: climate change policy can make a substantial contribution to reducing air pollution. See: EEA Briefing 02/2006: Air quality and ancillary benefits of climate change policies, http://reports.eea.europa.eu/technical_report_2006_4/en.