



# Impact of air and water pollution on the environment and public health

House of Lords Debate, Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Parliamentary Briefing

CIEH is a charity and professional membership body for Environmental Health Professionals across the country.

We have a heritage of more than 130 years and our purpose is to help our members and the wider profession achieve the objective of enabling safer, cleaner and healthier environments for the benefit of people, businesses and local communities.

## Air quality in the UK

### Key Points

- Good air quality is a basic requirement and determinant of health.
- The failure of the UK to meet legislative and, arguably, more importantly WHO standards, has led to increased hospital admissions placing excess burden on the NHS.
- In the UK, 814 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) exist where pollutant levels exceed legislative standards. With some of these standards set at twice the World Health Organisation acceptable levels it is clear that air quality is a significant public health issue.
- Poor outdoor air quality results in around 40,000 premature deaths annually in the UK.
- In the UK, air pollution costs businesses and health care services in excess of £20 billion annually.

With air quality spanning a wide range of policy areas it is clear that everyone has a role to play in improving air quality.

There is evidence of the contribution of poor air quality to illnesses such as cancer, stroke, asthma and heart disease, and there are also strong associations with obesity, dementia and diabetes all of which are chronic illnesses on

the increase in the UK. The effects are especially evident in vulnerable people such as children, the elderly and those with existing cardio-vascular and respiratory issues.

Whilst higher socio-economic groups are also exposed to poor air quality, the impact on these groups is far less than on lower status groups, making air quality a matter of social injustice.

Furthermore, the majority of vehicular journeys are undertaken by people in the top 20% of income groups, with the health impacts of these journeys adversely and disproportionately affecting those in the bottom 20% of income groups. It therefore follows that improvements in air quality can result in narrowing of inequalities in health.

## What Needs to Happen

In order to begin tackling the very real impact of worsening air quality on environmental and public health, we believe it is imperative that the below steps are taken:

- Government commitment to give this issue the highest priority and to recognise that air quality and climate change are inextricably linked.
- A new Clean Air Act, which is fit for the future and which creates a comprehensive framework for delivering improvements in air quality in the UK.

- Acknowledgement from all agencies that poor indoor air quality also needs to be addressed.
- A new air quality strategy from DEFRA that recognises that air pollution is a national issue and is not merely a problem for urban areas.
- As a key component of a new Government air quality strategy, a commitment is given to a national transport strategy and infrastructure that seeks to reduce air pollution.
- Nationally set parameters for new houses to ensure they are fit for the future e.g. the provision of electric vehicle charging points and the provision of ultra-low NOx emission boilers.
- National campaigns and advertising to encourage sustainable and active transport, dissuade people from travelling by car and promoting walking and cycling in congested areas.

## How You Can Help

In order for government to begin to fully recognise the growing threat of poor air quality, the issue needs to be raised at parliament.

As such, we would be very grateful if you would consider:

1. Tabling Written or Oral Parliamentary Questions
2. Tabling an EDM
3. Speaking in a debate
4. Writing to the Secretary of State for the Environment

We would be very happy to draft any content to support your parliamentary activities around air quality and environmental and public health, so please do let us know.

## Contact

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