

CAMPAIGN FOR CLEAN AIR IN LONDON

"The cross-party campaign to achieve urgently and sustainably at least World Health Organisation recommended standards of air quality throughout London"

Campaign website: www.cleanairinlondon.org

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Petition Prime Minister for Clean Air in London

To all Londoners (and others in the UK) worried about poor air quality:

"We are petitioning the Prime Minister to Pledge the Government's full support to achieve urgently World Health Organisation recommended standards of air quality throughout London. Please sign our Petition to the Prime Minister today and forward it to others who are worried about the serious health effects of air pollution and promote the link on your website if you have one", said Simon Birkett, Principal Contact for the Campaign for Clean Air in London:

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/LondonCleanAir/>

Breaches of European Union legal limits in 2005 and 2006

Air pollution in London is unacceptably high at more than twice World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended levels in the busiest streets. London's air pollution is the worst in the United Kingdom (UK) and is likely to be amongst the top three worst in large European cities.

The worst air pollutants from an air quality or health perspective are nitrogen dioxide, street level ozone and particulate matter. These are known to cause biological mutations, poor lung development, breathing difficulties and premature death. A well known effect is asthma which is the most common health problem for children. Another common air pollutant is carbon dioxide which is a focus of climate change concerns.

Air quality in London is so bad that the Mayor has estimated that 1,031 people died in London in 2005 as a result of particulate matter alone. This is more than four times the number of people who died from road traffic accidents. The Mayor has said also that there were widespread breaches of European Union (EU) legal limits for particulate matter in London in 2005.

Transport for London has admitted recently that, unless action is taken, some 1,370,000 Londoners will be exposed to nitrogen dioxide at greater than WHO recommended levels in 2008 (which correspond to the EU legal limit levels for nitrogen dioxide in 2010 which were put in legislation as early as 1999). This number is expected to drop only to 625,000 people by 2012. The five boroughs in London with the most people affected by high air pollution are Camden, the City of Westminster, Islington, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Southwark.

We don't really know how bad the ozone problem is since there are only about a dozen pollution monitoring stations in Central London. We do know however that five of those sites breached the rolling eight hour mean ozone objective in 2006. You will also be familiar with the ozone caused smog.

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Strong cross-party and media support within London

To tackle this problem, we set up the cross-party Campaign for Clean Air in London which has only one aim which is to achieve urgently WHO recommended standards of air quality throughout London (and the rest of the UK). The Campaign has received support from the Mayor of London personally, politicians from the four main political parties as well as leading business and community groups representing virtually all of Central London. Supporters include the Central London Partnership and London First. The first politician to support the Campaign was Sian Berry, the Green Party's candidate for Mayor in 2008. Our Campaign website address is:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/G1956>

We have already received valuable media coverage of our Campaign from the BBC, the Evening Standard, the Observer/Guardian, thelondonpaper and This is Local London. We hope others will support us.

We are pleased to have gained our first national support recently from the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection and the Alliance Against Urban 4x4s.

The UK Government needs to play its part

Despite such strong support, London cannot solve the air pollution problem alone. Londoners therefore need to come together on this important issue and press the UK Government to play its part.

Together, we need to press the UK Government to: adopt a Climate Change Bill that treats air pollution holistically (or else diesel engines will be favoured over petrol because they produce 20% less carbon dioxide despite producing three times the amount of emissions of particulate matter and nitrogen oxides); ensure that there is a robust legal framework in the EU and the UK so that a consistent approach will be taken to air quality; publish an Air Quality Strategy that makes clear how and when Air Quality Objectives will be achieved; set incentives and taxes that will change peoples' behaviour; and approve technical and testing standards for the abatement of nitrogen oxides from older vehicles of all sorts that might otherwise be charged heavily for entering Central London.

Petition the Prime Minister

As a start, we wrote to the Prime Minister shortly before Christmas asking him to Pledge his support for the Campaign for Clean Air in London.

Disappointed after having received an acknowledgement but no reply after two months, we submitted a petition to the Prime Minister's website asking him to Pledge not just his support but the full support of the Government to achieve urgently WHO recommended standards of air quality throughout London (and the rest of the UK).

After 17 days without any response (compared to the target maximum of five working days), our Petition was finally published:

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We urge you to sign the Petition so that the Government knows that Londoners are no longer willing to accept the health consequences of severe air pollution and that we want every necessary action taken to achieve urgently a minimum of WHO recommended standards of air quality throughout London.

Breaches of EU legal limits in Scotland and Wales

This is not just an English problem. In 2006, Glasgow and Port Talbot (and Scunthorpe) joined for the first time London and Bradford in hitting or breaching EU legal limits for particulate matter. We wait to see now whether the EU will seek enforcement action against the UK Government.

When will a framework be in place to tackle air pollution holistically?

How could anyone in the UK or Europe criticise China, which is taking the toughest measures to improve its air quality ahead of the 2008 Olympics, when the UK is not currently expected to achieve WHO standards of air quality by the time of its own Olympics in 2012?

Let's hope that we can all look back on the first anniversary of David Miliband announcing his consultation on the Climate Change Bill, which is the day this Petition is due to close and a few weeks before London's 2008 Mayoral election and with a new Prime Minister, to see a world that has shown it can do something to reduce urgently dangerous levels of air pollution.

Simon Birkett
Principal Contact
Campaign for Clean Air in London