

Toxic air will kill 160,000 in the next decade, charity warns

The Times, Kaya Burgess Report, January 13 2020

Dirty air will lead to more than 160,000 deaths from heart attacks and strokes over the next decade unless Britain signs up to stricter pollution limits, a charity has warned.

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) said that there could be more than 40 deaths from heart and circulatory conditions every day as a direct result of particulate pollution across the UK. It is calling for Britain to sign up to stricter limits on the amount of fine particulate (PM2.5) pollution in the air.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that the amount of PM2.5 pollution must not exceed annual average levels of 10mcg per cubic metre. Britain is signed up to European Union limits, which are less stringent at 25mcg. The BHF is calling on the UK to adopt the WHO limits.

Fine particulate pollution is small enough to pass into the bloodstream and has been linked to heart disease, strokes and lung cancer. A study this month linked PM2.5 pollution to lower bone density and others have linked it to depression.

Jacob West, an executive director at the charity, said: "Every day millions of us inhale toxic particles that enter our blood and get stuck in our organs, raising our risk of heart attacks and stroke. Our toxic air is a public health emergency and we haven't done enough to tackle this threat. We need to ensure that stricter, health-based air quality guidelines are adopted into law. Clean air legislation in the 1950s and 60s, and more recently the smoking ban in public places, show that government action can improve the air we breathe."

A report from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) last year assessed whether Britain could meet the WHO limits and concluded that "while challenging, it would be technically feasible".

David Renard, the Local Government Association's transport spokesman, said: "Councils are playing a key role in tackling air pollution and want to work with the government to reduce the impact of harmful emissions on the health of our communities.

"For air quality plans to be successful, they need to be underpinned by sufficient funding."

A Defra spokeswoman said the government was "stepping up the pace and taking urgent action to improve air quality".

She said: "Alongside our Clean Air Strategy, which has been praised by the WHO as an example for the rest of the world to follow, our landmark environment bill will include a commitment to a legally binding target on fine particulate matter, which will improve the quality of millions of people's lives."

Stephen Powis, medical director of the NHS, said: "The climate emergency is also a health emergency, with thousands of avoidable deaths and hospital admissions every year linked to air pollution. Tackling air pollution needs to be everyone's urgent business."

The **Local Government Association** responded to the BHF confirming that Local Authorities are important partners in addressing local conditions alongside the national initiatives -

<https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-responds-british-heart-foundation-air-pollution-warning>.