

The Times: "Clean Air For All" - May 10th 2019

Thousands face air pollution cancer risk living by motorways

Tens of thousands of people living close to Scotland's busiest motorways are at risk of lung diseases and cancer due to dangerous levels of emissions, an investigation by The Times has found.

Communities in the Central Belt are hot spots where fine particles in the air exceed the limits recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The Times has begun a campaign for a new Clean Air Act, which would give everyone the right to be protected from toxic air that contributes to 40,000 UK deaths a year, including 2,500 in Scotland. Today, the leaders of Britain's doctors insist that UK ministers are ignoring medical advice and doing the "minimum possible" on air pollution.

The Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health say the UK government has focused on a "series of distractions" such as wood-burning stoves to avoid the real problem of traffic fumes.

Ministers only stress the downsides of curbing car use, experts said, despite dirty air meaning every person in Britain is smoking the equivalent of a cigarette a day. Matt Hancock, the UK health secretary, has insisted that he is "very worried" about the scale of illness caused by pollution.

"Poor air quality directly affects the health of the nation and it directly affects my budgets in increased health costs," he said. In Scotland it has emerged that residents living close to the M8 in North Lanarkshire are among those most exposed to the pollution and have reported lung infections, pleurisy, and asthma.

Air quality on the fringes of two of Scotland's best loved parks, Bellahouston and Strathclyde Country Park, is worse than in New York, posing a health risk to campers and children.

North Lanarkshire Bio Power wants to build an incinerator at Carnbroe, a village on the fringes of the Eurocentral junction on the M8, which already has the worst air quality of any community in Scotland.

Susan Whyte, 49, began suffering from serious lung conditions when she moved to the nearby village of Chapelhall five years ago from West Lothian. "In that time I have been diagnosed with asthma and had at least four lung infections every year," she said.

"In 2014 I suffered my first ever lung infection. From then on I had several bouts of lung infections and was told after a bad case of pleurisy that I had been left with a weakness in my lungs and more susceptible to infections.

"I have been sent for X-rays and a spirometer test which resulted last year in me being diagnosed with asthma at the age of 49. I have never smoked."

The WHO threshold is 10 microgrammes of particulates per cubic metre and the Scottish communities identified are in areas on or over the limit. Health experts say that the prevalence of conditions such as heart attacks, blocked and hardened arteries, cardiovascular disease, asthma, low birth weight, childhood cancer and lung cancer are all higher within 150 metres of a busy road.

Thousands of people work at Eurocentral, which is also home to the 92-room Dakota hotel. Levels in this area are 11 microgrammes per cubic metre.

The Strathclyde Country Park campsite and M&D's theme park lie on the fringes of the A725 Bellshill bypass, another pollution blackspot where levels are 10 microgrammes.

Rangers players and fans inhale lungfuls of dangerous emissions less than 200 metres from the Dumbreck interchange, which the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs has identified as one of the most polluted junctions in Scotland. To the south, people at Bellahouston Bowling Club or the botanical gardens and children in the playground or at the ski centre could be inhaling toxic fumes from the M8 and Paisley Road West.

Joseph Carter, head of the British Lung Foundation Scotland, said: "Commuter towns close to major arterial roads can see spikes in air pollution due to increased roadside activity during peak travel times.

"This means that people can inhale levels of particulates that are in excess of the WHO limits, which over the long-term can store up major health problems like asthma, cardiovascular disease and even dementia. Particulate matter pollution is particularly dangerous, as these tiny particles can irritate the delicate tissues inside the lung."

He added: "There is no safe level of particulate matter pollution and long-term exposure to it can stunt the growth of children's lungs. Measures which protect children from the harmful effects of air pollution, such as banning cars around school gates, are essential to ensure that every child in Scotland can grow up breathing clean air with healthy lungs."

Shirley Cleland, head of fleet and environmental services at South Lanarkshire council, said: "We have generally good and improving air quality, but there are some localised air-pollution hotspots". She said the council had an air quality strategy and was looking at an action plan to address concerns across the whole district, including "a few limited locations that have been identified as problem sites".

The government's clean air strategy is being reviewed after criticism. an incinerator at Carnbroe, a village on the fringes of the Eurocentral junction on the M8, which already has the worst air quality of any community in Scotland.