

The Times, CLEAN AIR FOR ALL CAMPAIGN: 'Tax toxic tyres that pollute air'

Ben Webster, Environment Editor, The Times - June 10 2019

Tyres should be subject to an air pollution tax because they release thousands of toxic particles as they wear down, a leading environmental consultant said.

Dominic Hogg, chairman of Eunomia, said that tyres accounted for a growing proportion of particles from cars and a tax was needed to encourage drivers to choose ones that wore more slowly and had lower emissions.

Regulations on exhaust emissions from new cars have become tighter but there are no limits on emissions from brakes and tyres. Dust from tyre and brake wear can damage lungs, research by King's College London suggests.

Frank Kelly, professor of environmental health at the university, said that electric cars were contributing to the problem. He told Britain's Toxic Air Scandal, a Channel 4 Dispatches documentary, that ***modern tyres were made mainly from plastic.***

"When we go to electric cars there'll be no tailpipe emissions but we're going to get plastic emissions from road wear, plastic emissions from tyres," he said.

About half of the particles emitted from vehicles come from exhausts and the other half from tyres, brakes, clutches and road wear, according to a European Commission Joint Research Centre report in 2014.

It said: "As exhaust emissions control become stricter, relative contributions of non-exhaust sources to traffic related emissions will increasingly become more significant."

Mr Hogg said: "Tyres are a nightmare because they abrade and we can't control what happens to the particles." He said plastic particles from tyres also polluted rivers and the seas after being washed into drains.

Mr Hogg said tyres should be tested for their abrasion rates and labelled and taxed accordingly. The European Commission is considering requiring such tests.

The Dispatches documentary also reports on tests by King's College London on primary school children in north London who were found to be exposed to nitrogen dioxide pollution 53 per cent higher than the legal limit.

The Times's Clean Air for All campaign is calling for a new Clean Air Act to give everyone a legal right to unpolluted air and temporary traffic bans outside schools at drop-off and pick-up times

A classroom next to a busy road at Lordship Lane Primary School, in Haringey, had nitrogen dioxide levels more than a fifth higher than the other classrooms in the school.

More than 50 children at the school wore backpacks for a week containing air pollution monitors.

Pupils driven to school breathed in 30 per cent more toxic particles than those who walked. Pollution sucked into cars via ventilation systems can become trapped inside the vehicle.

The level of pollution in the classrooms fell by a quarter after £30,000 was spent installing air purifiers and also planting hedges around the boundary to trap some of the traffic pollution.

Anna Kettley, director of programmes at Unicef UK, the children's charity, said: "This experiment shows that simple interventions can make a big difference to children's exposure to air pollution. Over 2,000 schools and nurseries across the UK are in areas with dangerously high levels of air pollution, so tackling the problem in and around these places can have valuable impact for children's health.

"The government has a fundamental responsibility to ensure that every child grows up in a safe and clean environment.