

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Defra warns of first "summer smog" of 2007

Warm, sunny, weather forecast over Southern England over the next few days is likely to lead to the first summer smog episode of 2007.

Moderate ozone levels are forecast from Saturday for south-east England and the midlands. On Sunday high ozone levels are likely to extend to the rest of England and Wales. These levels are likely to persist until at least Monday.

Some people are more sensitive to ozone than others and may begin to notice an effect on their breathing. People with asthma are not necessarily more sensitive but, if affected, can use their 'reliever' inhaler. The public are being urged to take sensible precautions:

- Avoiding exercise outdoors in the afternoon can reduce exposure to ozone.
- Avoiding making unnecessary short car journeys wherever possible can reduce the formation of ozone.

Regular updates on levels of particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>), sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone and carbon monoxide are available on: TELETXT (page 156), the Internet [www.airquality.co.uk](http://www.airquality.co.uk) (Air Quality Information Archive) and the Department's freephone helpline (0800 556677), which also offers health advice to those who may be particularly sensitive to air pollution.

### Notes to editors

Ground level ozone is formed when sunlight acts on nitrogen dioxide and other atmospheric substances close to the ground. The pollutants that cause ground level ozone come from a range of sources, including petrol and other fuels.

## **Air Quality Measurement and Forecasts**

Air pollution is described as "Low (1-3)", "Moderate (4-6)", "High (7-9)" or "Very High (10)" The classifications were chosen on the basis of effects on health and are based on the latest medical and scientific research. Full details of the bands for all the pollutants are available on the Defra website.

In addition to the sources of air quality information described in the press release, the information and the air pollution forecast is also sent by e-mail, free of charge, daily to a variety of outlets including regional and national newspapers, television and radio stations, environmental groups, local authorities, and international organisations (e.g. RIVM in the Netherlands). If you would like to be added to this individual service, ring the Government's contractors at AEA Energy & Environment (Paul Willis on 0870 190 6602)

## **Health Advice**

The following advice on health applies when air pollution is "high" or "very high"

"During episodes of air pollution experienced during the summer in the United Kingdom, levels of ozone, nitrogen dioxide and particles may be raised. Most people will experience no ill effects. Those suffering from lung diseases (including asthma) particularly if elderly should be aware that their symptoms might worsen. They may need to consider modifying their treatment as they usually do when symptoms increase, consulting their doctor if this is not effective.

People who have noticed in the past that their breathing is affected on hot, sunny days should avoid strenuous outdoor activity, particularly in the afternoon. Children with asthma should be able to take part in games in the usual way, although they may need to increase their use of reliever medicines before participating. There is no need for them to stay away from school.

Those suffering from a heart condition and who notice a change in their symptoms should get medical advice as they normally would."

Health advice is also available on TELETEXT (Page 156).

## **Presentation of the information**

When air pollution levels are presented to the public, an overall summary is provided followed by pollutant specific information. When the overall summary is presented for each region, levels of air pollution are described as those occurring in the highest band for any individual pollutant. For example, if levels of all pollutants in a region were low, with the exception of one pollutant that was high, then in the overall summary the air pollution for that region would be described as "high".

### **Action individuals can take to reduce pollution.**

Road vehicles are a major source of many pollutants in urban areas. Before using your car ask yourself - do I really need to make this journey? Do I really need to use the car, or could I walk or cycle?

If you must drive, switch off the engine if you expect to be stationary for more than a couple of minutes, and drive smoothly - it will save you fuel and money and you will emit less pollution. Avoid overfilling the petrol tank and spilling petrol - this evaporates and releases hydrocarbons that are toxic and form ozone.

Buy water-based or low-solvent paints, glues, varnishes, and wood preservatives wherever you can.

Avoid burning solid fuels if you can.

## **UK**

The **Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland** was originally published in 2000. it aims to:

- map out as far as possible current and future ambient air quality policy in the United Kingdom in the medium term
- provide the best practicable protection to human health and the environment by setting the evidence based objectives for the main air pollutants, and
- describe the air pollution climate in the UK to provide a framework to allow all those who contribute to air pollution, who have a part to play in its abatement, or are affected by it, to identify their role in improving air quality

- the Strategy sets National Air Quality Objectives for 9 major air pollutants: benzene, 1,3 butadiene, carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulates, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and sulphur dioxide to be achieved between 2003 - 2010. These are similar, or in some cases, tighter than EU Directive limit values.
- UK maintained and met the objectives for 4 pollutants in 2006 and are meeting our current objectives for all air pollutants in most parts of the country - up to 99.5% in some cases and only limited number of hotspot areas remain. But we missed objectives for nitrogen dioxide, ozone and particulates in some parts of the UK.
- The Strategy has recently been reviewed to find potential new measures to generate health benefits and move us closer to meeting the objectives. A consultation document setting out options for further improvement of air quality was published last year (Defra PN 158/06); a copy is available on Defra's website: [www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/airqualstrat-review/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/airqualstrat-review/index.htm) together with a summary of responses. The proposals in the consultation included:
  - a package of new and previously agreed measures which will reduce average exposure to air pollutants for everyone; which if implemented could see an increase in life expectancy of three months by 2020;
  - The range of measures, includes
    - new tighter European vehicle emissions standards (so called Euro-standards);
    - incentives for cleaner vehicles;
    - further reductions in emissions from ships

## Europe

The Ozone Directive (2002/3/EC; third Daughter Directive) sets target values for ozone for the protection of human health and the protection of vegetation to be attained by 2010. Where the target values are not met the UK must put in place plans or programmes to attain them, except where the target values are not achievable through proportionate measures. The Directive also sets long-term objectives for ozone levels for the protection of human health and vegetation with

the year 2020 as a bench-mark. The Directive also requires that the public be informed when hourly levels are above an 'information threshold' of 180 micrograms per metre cubed or a 'warning threshold' of 240 micrograms per metre cubed. .The UK complies with this requirement.

The target values in the ozone Directive were developed in line with the national emissions ceilings for NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs, ozone precursors, set under the National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NECD).

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Since 2005, the European Parliament and the Council have been considering a Commission proposal for a new ambient air quality framework Directive. The draft Directive consolidates and simplifies existing legislation and introduces new measures to control levels of fine particulate matter. The pollutants covered include oxides of nitrogen, particles and ozone. The proposal is currently under negotiation.

### **August 2003 and June/July 2006 Summer Smog Episodes**

A short report entitled 'An estimate of the health impact of the August 2003 Photochemical episode' by John Stedman at Netcen was published on 13 January 2004. This estimated the contribution of ground level ozone and particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>) to the number of deaths brought forward by in the first

two weeks of August 2003. The short report is available on the Air Quality Archive Website:

- [www.airquality.co.uk/archive/reports/cat09/0401130931\\_heatwave2003.pdf](http://www.airquality.co.uk/archive/reports/cat09/0401130931_heatwave2003.pdf)

A report on the summer smog episode during June and July 2006 is also available on the Air Quality Archive website:

- [http://www.airquality.co.uk/archive/reports/cat12/0701241100\\_APF\\_episode\\_JunJul06\\_FINAL\\_low.pdf](http://www.airquality.co.uk/archive/reports/cat12/0701241100_APF_episode_JunJul06_FINAL_low.pdf)

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