



Atmospheric Issues

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AIR QUALITY

AIR QUALITY STRATEGY UPDATED

The Air Quality Strategy of 2000, has been updated by the UK Government and assemblies of the devolved regions, through the production of an Addendum. The Addendum explains the changes that have been made since the Air Quality Strategy of 2000, including changes to the objectives for particles, benzene and carbon monoxide and the introduction of a provisional objective for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

DEFRA have said that it is hoped that future reviews will focus more on the policy objectives needed to deliver the reductions in pollutants rather than on the air quality objections themselves.

The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: Addendum can be viewed online at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/airquality/strategy/addendum/index.htm> Alternatively, it can be obtained free of charge from Defra Publications, Admail 6000, London, SW1A 2XX, Tel: 08459 556000, or via email: defra@iforcegroup.com

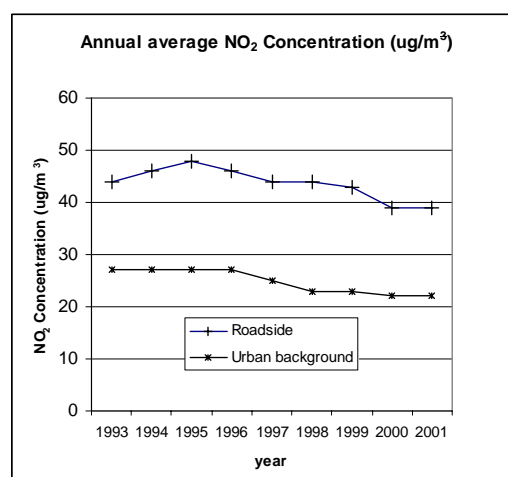
The Addendum also lists useful air quality web addresses, including **aric's** new web pages: <http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/resources>

Source: DEFRA News Release, 6 February 2003; Air Quality Management, February 2003; The AQS Addendum, DEFRA, 2003.

NATIONAL TRENDS IN NO₂: DECLINE STALLS

Long-term nitrogen dioxide levels have been falling in the UK in recent years but this decline stalled in 2001. Regional variations showed that NO₂ levels actually increased in three of the twelve regions (London, Yorkshire the Humber and the South West).

The stall occurs for both urban background and roadside sites as shown in the graph below.



Source: http://www.airquality.co.uk/archive/reports/cat13/n_o2_2001_report.pdf, Air Quality Management, February 2003.

LONDON CONGESTION CHARGES IMPLEMENTED

The £5 congestion charge to travel through central London is now in operation. The congestion charge has been introduced by Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, to help reduce congestion in the city centre and cut air pollution. Amounts paid in congestion charges during the first week of the implementation were down £1m compared to predicted estimates. Vehicle numbers were down by 20-25% during the first week and hence many claim the scheme a success. However, retailers in central London stores have already noticed a slump in sales compared to the same week in 2002. Others unhappy with the scheme will include the 15 000 drivers who did not pay their congestion charge - they will receive £80 penalty tickets through the post!

A website to counter all the anti congestion charge websites has also been set up, to give a voice to the 87% of Central London commuters who travel by foot, bicycle or public transport. www.wiseupandpay.co.uk

Source: BBC News 17 February 2003
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2772583.stm>

NEW EPAQS CHIEF

The Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards has a new Chair, Professor Stephen Holgate. Prof Holgate is Medical Research Council clinical professor of immunopharmacology and honorary consultant physician at Southampton General and Royal Bournemouth Hospitals. He has a special interest in asthma and allergies. He replaces Anthony Seaton who retired last year.

Source: DEFRA News Release 12 Feb. 2003; Air Quality Management, February 2003.

CLIMATE CHANGE

BRITAIN'S CLIMATE AND ENERGY FUTURE

Last month the UK Government published jointly the White Paper, Our Energy Future - Creating a Low Carbon Economy, and the Government's response to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's 22nd report, Energy - the Changing Climate. The White Paper sets out ambitious targets to reduce harmful carbon emissions over the next 50 years, with major increases in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary Margaret Beckett hailed the Energy White Paper as a major strengthening of the Government's commitment to sustainable development. Mrs Beckett said, "In future, our energy policy will have as one of its principal goals the reduction of carbon emissions. We have accepted the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution that we need to cut carbon emissions by 60% by around the middle of this century if we are to make our contribution to avoiding the worst effects of climate change."

Four goals set by the Energy White Paper include:

- cutting the UK's carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by about 2050, with real progress by 2020;
- maintaining the reliability of energy supplies;
- promoting competitive markets in the UK and beyond, helping to raise the rate of sustainable economic growth and improve our productivity; and
- ensuring that every home is adequately and affordably heated.

The Government also has a target of producing 10% of Britain's electricity from green power by 2010, in contrast to 3% at present. Much of this new renewable

energy is to come from wind power, with approximately 5,000 more wind turbines being built. The Government has also proposed changing planning laws to prevent windfarm development being undermined by local objections. The White Paper, however, failed to make a firm commitment to raise this to 20% by 2020. If the UK is to reach its target of a 60% cut in carbon dioxide emissions, it is likely that renewable energy will have to be contributing at least a third of UK electricity generation.

The Government admitted, however, that the switch to renewable energy would push up household electricity bills by up to 15%, and gas bills by up to 5%. Currently, the increase would amount to an average of £55 per household per year.

The Energy White Paper is available on the dti website at:

<http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/whitepaper/index.shtml>

Press packs, including copies of the White Paper, statistics and briefing notes on key policy areas are available from the dti Press Office, Tel: 020 7215 6407 / 5960/ 5976.

Energy - the Changing Climate can be found on the Defra website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/rcep/index.htm>

Hard copies are available from Defra press office on 020 7238 5610.

Source: DEFRA; dti; *The Times On-line*, 25th February 2002: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/>; Reuters, 25th February 2002.

WORLD HOTTING UP ACCORDING TO DEFRA

The Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Global Atmosphere Division's bi-annual report, published last month, recognises that global temperatures have reached unprecedented levels in recent

years and greenhouse gases are at the highest background levels in the atmosphere ever recorded.

Global climate data analysed by the Hadley Centre - the UK's premier climate modelling centre - indicates that stabilisation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will be harder to achieve as positive feedbacks in the carbon cycle accelerate the warming.

This report reveals that the UK is making good progress to tackle its greenhouse gas emissions, with the nation on target to meet its Kyoto commitment of a 12.5% reduction by 2008-2012, but much more needs to be done to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a safe level.

The report will help the UK to make a key contribution to the next round of international scientific assessments by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and to the international debate on the further action that countries must take in the future (post-2012), following the first Kyoto commitment period.

The key findings of the report are:

- Measurements have shown that atmospheric concentrations of many greenhouse gases reached their highest ever levels in 2001
- Global temperatures have continued to rise with 2002 joining 2001 and 1998 in the top 3 hottest years on record
- Hadley Centre's carbon-climate model shows that carbon cycle feedbacks from forests and natural vegetation could strongly accelerate global warming in the future
- The UKCIP02 Climate Change scenarios - the most detailed climate scenarios ever produced for the UK - suggest a future of hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters

- Action being taken in the UK could reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to 23% below 1990 levels by 2010
- Action to limit emissions of ozone depleting substances under the Montreal Protocol should ensure recovery of the ozone layer within the next fifty years.

Source: DEFRA Press Release, 11th February 2002:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/>

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

ACHIEVING A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

Also launched last month by the UK Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs was the Government's 3rd annual report on sustainable development in the UK: *Achieving a Better Quality of Life*. The report updates progress on the Government's 15 headline indicators of sustainable development: the 'quality of life' barometer. These show good progress in a number of key areas, for example housing conditions, employment and land use, across the three pillars of sustainable development - the economy, society, and the environment. However, there are inevitably some areas where progress has been slower.

In the annual report, the headline indicators report:

- historically high levels of employment and continued economic growth;
- continued progress on tackling poverty and social exclusion
- fewer households living in non-decent housing, and an increase in the percentage of new homes built on previously developed land or through conversion of existing buildings;
- a rise in recorded violent crime, particularly robberies, although there is strong evidence that levels of all crime, whether reported to the police or not, have been falling.

- increased road traffic volume, but a weakening of the link between economic growth and road traffic growth;
- an increase in the levels of household waste produced, though some improvement in the amount recycled.
- emissions of greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide increased slightly compared with the previous year, but are still much less than a decade ago. The UK is still on target to meet its Kyoto commitments and move towards the domestic goal to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20% by 2010.

Source: DEFRA Press Release, 24th February 2002:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/>

DASH FOR HYDROGEN FUELS NOT BENEFICIAL

Rushing to fuel vehicles with hydrogen may not be beneficial for the environment, according to a new study by researchers in the UK.

The report for the Department of Transport, produced by experts from National Society for Clean Air, the Energy Savings Trust, and Institute for European Environmental Policy, claims that rushing to expand hydrogen as a transport fuel could prove damaging to the environment.

It would make more sense, say the authors to use renewable electricity such as wind power to produce hydrogen for the transport fleet rather than using electricity from fossil fuelled power stations.

Details of the report *Fuelling Road Transport – Implications for Energy Policy* can be found on the NSCA website: www.nasca.org.uk

Source: NSCA Briefing, February 2003