

'A lifeline for dirty cars': EU backs new air pollution limits, but not until 2035

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

- a. Which of these environmental issues is the biggest problem? Rank these issues from 1 (biggest problem) to 7 (smallest problem). Give reasons for your choices.

2 lack of clean water

1 lack of clean air

4 biodiversity

7 fossil fuels

3 plastic

3 deforestation

1 sea level rise

2 Key words

- a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to match the definitions below. Then, find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

accelerate

alignment

backlash

bloodstream

breach

compensation

comply

concentration

epidemiologist

guideline

lifeline

particle

pollutant

rollout

slow motion

- a substance that causes pollution, especially in air and water pollutant
- the exact amount of something in another thing concentration
- a strong adverse reaction by a group of people to something in society or politics
backlash
- a scientist who studies diseases epidemiologist
- an agreement between countries, political parties, or people to reach a shared goal
alignment
- a tiny piece of something particle
- the act of breaking a law, contract, or agreement breach
- information to advise people on how something should be done or what something should be

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9. the flow of blood around the body bloodstream
10. an action that seems to happen more slowly than usual slowmotion
11. money that is paid to someone because of something that has been lost or damaged or for some problem compensation
12. act according to an order, rule, or request comply
13. make something happen sooner or faster accelerate
14. when a company or government makes something available for the first time, especially a product or service rollout
15. a way of getting help to get something you depend on to live your life lifeline

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. After the new law passed, there was a massive backlash from the people who opposed it.
2. He said that when he got into the car accident, it felt like it was happening in slow motion.
3. Because she was hurt on the job, she received compensated to cover the medical bills and lost wages.
4. Petrol will accelerate how fast a fire spreads.
5. On their first day, they learned about the company's policies and guidelines during orientation.
6. When the rollout happens, the company will offer its new line of electric vehicles.
7. If you do not comply with the court order, you will be arrested.
8. Some of the pollutants in water are bacteria, viruses, pesticides, and plastics.
9. After you take the medicine, it will enter your bloodstream, and you will start to feel the effects.
10. The lawyer's client was being sued for breach of contract.

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MEPs vote for WHO guidelines on several substances, but centre-right backlash puts implementation back five years

Ajit Niranjana

13 September, 2023

- 1 The EU has voted to clean its air by setting tough limits on pollutants in a move that experts say will save lives and money.
- 2 The European Parliament agreed on Wednesday to limit the concentration of several dangerous substances to levels put forward by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- 3 But after a backlash from centre-right politicians, it decided to push back the date for meeting the WHO's limits by five years.
- 4 "This is great news for all European citizens, especially the millions who live with lung conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease," said Zorana Jovanovic Andersen, an epidemiologist at the University of Copenhagen and chair of the European Respiratory Society's environment and health committee.
- 5 The vote "is an important step in the right direction towards clean air for all, even though the full alignment with the WHO was moved from 2030 to 2035," she said.
- 6 Almost everyone in Europe's urban areas breathes air containing enough fine particles to breach the WHO's yearly guideline level of 5 µg/m³. The particles, known as PM_{2.5}, are small enough to pass into the bloodstream, where they spread through the body and damage organs.
- 7 Scientists and doctors estimate that outdoor air pollution – including other harmful gases such as nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and ozone – kills 300,000 people in Europe each year.
- 8 "We are facing, with air pollution, a slow-motion pandemic," said Javier López, a Spanish MEP with the centre-left S&D grouping who was in charge of the proposal. "The administration should fight against air pollution like we were fighting against the pandemic."
- 9 The update to the air quality law, the details of which will now be finalised in negotiations with the European Council, was passed by 363 votes in favour to 226 votes against. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) grouping, to which the European Commission President and European Green Deal champion, Ursula von der Leyen belongs, voted against the proposal.
- 10 "With this vote, there is a new risk of driving bans and even the closure of construction sites and industrial plants," said Peter Liese, a German MEP and the EPP's environmental spokesperson.
- 11 Most politicians supporting the law were acting irresponsibly, he said. "We will continue to fight against excessive measures. It is an important and correct goal to further improve air quality. But we should rely on technology and not on bans."
- 12 The EPP, the largest grouping of elected officials in the European Parliament, has broken with its historical support for the Green Deal in recent months. It nearly ended a law to restore nature in July, and ran a public campaign that scientists criticised for spreading misinformation.
- 13 Opposition to the air quality law has had "the same intensity but is more under the radar", said Margherita Tolotto, the policy manager for air and noise at the environmental non-profit European Environment Bureau. "I do think they are a little bit more ashamed of contradicting air quality objectives because it's less sexy to go out in public and say: 'Hey, look, I'm lobbying for you to continue breathing polluted air.'"
- 14 As well as harming human health, dirty air holds back economies because governments have to spend more on healthcare, and workers take more days off sick. The European Commission found in a report that full compliance with the WHO limits for PM_{2.5} by 2030 would boost the economy more than weaker rules would.
- 15 The researchers worked out the net benefit to society each year to be 90 billion Euros if PM_{2.5} levels were limited to 15 µg/m³, and 123 billion Euros if they were brought down to 5 µg/m³.

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- 16 The proposal approved by the parliament calls for better monitoring of air pollution and information that is easier to access. It also includes clauses that give people greater rights to compensation if their governments do not comply with the limits.
- 17 Zachary Azdad, the vehicles policy officer at the non-profit Transport & Environment, said the law was a step in the right direction but that "delaying alignment with the WHO will cost lives because of years of avoidable air pollution".
- 18 "Today's vote will do little to accelerate the rollout of low and zero-emissions zones in Europe, throwing a lifeline to dirty diesel and petrol cars," he said.
- 19 Air pollution was the fourth biggest risk factor for early death globally in 2019, with only blood pressure, smoking and diet playing a greater role.
- 20 "The other three you have control over," said Barbara Hoffman, an environmental epidemiologist at the University of Düsseldorf. "If you have hypertension, you can take medication against it. You can stop smoking, or you cannot start smoking, and you can have a healthy diet.
- 21 "You cannot determine yourself the air that you're breathing."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What did the European Parliament agree to do? limit the concentration of several dangerous substances to levels put forward by the World Health Organization (WHO).
2. When did they agree to do it? 2035
3. How does epidemiologist Zorana Jovanovic Andersen feel about the news? happy but unhappy about delay to 2035
4. What is the WHO's yearly guideline for fine particles (PM2.5)?
5. Why are these particles harmful?
6. What is the estimate for how many people are killed because of air pollution in Europe each year?
7. What does Javi López, a Spanish MEP, compare the air pollution problem to?
8. What is Peter Liese's argument against the law?
9. What did researchers find the net benefit (in Euros) to the economy each year would be with PM2.5 levels at 15 µg/m³? And at 5 µg/m³?
10. What are the four most significant risk factors for earth death globally cited in the article?

4 Key language

a. Complete the table. All the nouns are used in the article.

| Verb | Noun |
|--------------|--------------|
| | pollution |
| administrate | |
| | negotiation |
| construct | |
| misinform | |
| | opposition |
| | compensation |
| direct | |

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b. Complete the sentences using the correct form of the word from task a.

1. There is a fine if you _____ the river.
2. The _____ is in charge of managing the process.
3. When you _____, remember what is most important for you in the deal.
4. Those people wearing hard hats and vests work in _____.
5. I'm afraid you were _____. There's no one by that name here.
6. Did the MP support or _____ the law?
7. Do you think she was _____ fairly after the incident?
8. Excuse me, could you give me _____ to the airport?

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Dirty air is worse than dirty water because you can't avoid it."
- "Waiting until 2035 for these limits is irresponsible."
- "Everyone has the right to clear air and water."

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about air pollution.

- What are some of the reasons it happens?
- What is your government doing to solve the problem? Is it working? Why do you think so?
- What are some ideas for how to slow, stop, or reverse it?
- Which idea(s) do you think are the most promising?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinion about the issue. You can use some of the expressions below.

According to the data/research, ...

Public opinion is ...

This has happened as a result of / due to ...

The most popular viewpoint is ...

The government proposed/passed...

The majority / A minority of people think ...

The facts/data showed ...

They agree to / They disagree on ...

The proposal/law/guidelines state ...

People are (not) certain that ...