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Air quality 2008: Caps for particulate matter exceeded once again

Loads low compared to previous year, yet no grounds for 'all clear' signal

The preliminary assessment of Germany's air quality in 2008 made by the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) shows that the existing caps on the pollutants particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) were also exceeded in 2008. Particulate matter concentrations at 19 of the total 421 measuring stations exceeded the caps (50 microgrammes/cubic metre air (↔g/m³)) more frequently than the permissible 35 days. Furthermore, the PM₁₀ limit value of 40 ↔g/m³, based on the annual mean value, was not complied with at the Stuttgart Neckartor measuring station. PM₁₀ (particulate matter) refers to dust particles whose diameter is less than 10 micrometres; 10 ↔m is 10 millionths of a metre.

Particulate matter pollution was relatively low in 2008, as it already was in 2007. "This was largely due to favourable weather conditions, with rare incidences of low-wind high pressure areas compensated by frequent thunderstorms and heavy rains", said Andreas Troge, President of UBA. "The loads at many sites are still much too high to warrant an "all clear", despite this positive trend. We must further reduce these load levels in order to live in healthy air", continued Troge.

Nearly half the measuring stations affected by traffic registered annual mean values for NO₂ that were above the cap of 40 ↔g/m³ to be complied with as of 2010. Should these loads continue unchanged in the next few years, there will be exceedences of the annual mean NO₂ cap in urban areas close to transport networks after 2010. NO₂ is the product of combustion processes in industry, households, and the transport sector. It is harmful to the respiratory tract.

The preliminary assessment of air quality data for 2008, including a comparison to previous years, is on the Internet at http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien/mysql_medien.php?anfrage=Kennummer&Suchwort=3596. Current air quality data is online at: <http://www.env-it.de/umweltbundesamt/luftdaten/index.html>

Dessau-Roßlau, 21 January 2009