

# Press Release No. 42/2009

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## Levels of particulate matter too high in Germany's urban areas Further measures to reduce emissions necessary

The levels of harmful particulate matter pollution in Germany's inner cities continues to remain too high. The ceiling (daily mean) of 50 microgrammes per cubic metre of air ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) has already been exceeded more often than the allowable 35 days a year in six cities, including Stuttgart and Munich. Another ten cities in North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg, Thuringia, Hesse, and Saxony are just short of exceeding the limit. One explanation is traceable to the weather conditions at the beginning of this year: high-pressure areas with weak winds that occurred more frequently than in 2007 and 2008 hampered removal of air pollutants.

"It is urgent that we reduce particulate pollution so that people, especially those in urban areas, may breathe healthy clean air", said Dr. Thomas Holzmann, Vice President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA). "There are means of cutting particulate emissions, and they must be put into action as quickly as possible."

Road traffic is one major source of particulate emissions. The following should be considered: If motor vehicles granted an "emission badge" --that is EURO 4 and better- only were to drive within Low Emission Zones, there would be 18 days fewer per year on which particulate ceilings are exceeded.

A 30-kmh speed limit on relevant main artery roads in cities would likely result in 10 days' fewer exceedences per year than at a 50-kmh limit.

Retrofitting EURO 3 and lower light commercial vehicles with diesel soot filters would serve to complement the above measures. This would affect up to 300,000 such vehicles in Germany. The *Laender*, who are responsible for monitoring compliance with clear air standards, might consider making use of EU structural funds to finance subsidy programmes.

The transport sector alone is not responsible for the high level of particulate pollution. Other sources also play a significant role, e.g. wood heating systems and fireplaces in private households and small business enterprise. So-called small firing installations represent the second largest producer of particulate matter. Achieving emissions reductions in this area requires stringent caps set on these heating systems, and the expected amendment of the Ordinance on Small Firing Installations provides for this. It is important that existing installations also reduce emissions. A reasonable transition period should be followed by establishment of a rigorous cap on particulate matter which operators have two possibilities to comply with: either they retrofit the installation with a filter that reduces particulate

emissions, or the installation is renewed entirely. The German Federal Ministry for Environment (BMU) has provided for some exceptions for a number of existing installations. These include installations which provide the only means to heat the housing unit and installations that mainly serve cooking purposes.

The high level of particulate pollution in cities stems not only from locally produced emissions. A considerable share is produced in the atmosphere by sulphur and nitrous oxide precursors and is transported into urban areas across long distances, which is a situation that demands a solution at the European level. Big cuts in emissions from large industrial facilities such as power plants seem necessary. The European Union is revising the regulations that apply to these industrial facilities, especially those in eastern Europe where there is a great need for remediation. Germany champions rigorous ceilings on particulate matter and its precursors and stands to gain from these efforts: a significant drop in the pollution originating from abroad can be expected in the medium term.

The new UBA background paper on particulate pollution (in German), *Feinstaubbelastung in Deutschland* [*Particulate pollution in Germany*] is available at

[http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/mysql\\_medien.php?anfrage=Kennummer&Suchwort=3565](http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/mysql_medien.php?anfrage=Kennummer&Suchwort=3565).

Up-to-date air quality data is on the Internet at: <http://www.env-it.de/umweltbundesamt/luftdaten/index.html>.

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