

Press Release No. 06/2012

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How good is air quality in Germany?

Ceiling for nitrogen dioxide exceeded at many locations / Repeated episodes of excessive levels of particulate matter

The air in Germany in 2011 once again had excessive levels of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide pollution. Mean particulate matter levels were above those of the previous four years, and nitrogen dioxide pollution remained high. These are the results of an initial evaluation by the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) of preliminary measurement data submitted by the *Länder* and UBA. Limit values for particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide are often exceeded in the immediate vicinity of urban roads. Daily averages for particulate matter were above the allowable limit at 42 per cent of stations near roads. The limit allows for daily averages of more than 50 micrograms of fine particles (PM₁₀) per cubic metre air (\leftrightarrow g/m³) on no more than 35 days. Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels were above the allowable yearly average of 40 \leftrightarrow g/m³ at 57 per cent of urban stations located near traffic.

UBA President Flasbarth has pleaded for continued air pollution control efforts, declaring that "air quality is good across many areas in Germany. However, we must step up efforts in those areas where the air people breathe is still too polluted by particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide, namely in cities and densely populated areas. Low-emission zones have been put in place to that end. Introduction of the latest emission standard (EURO 6) and its steady pervasion of the road motor vehicle stock will improve conditions in the future."

Flasbarth pointed out that low-emission zones are only part of the solution since particulate matter and nitrous oxides are also produced in industrial and household incineration processes. Agricultural emissions also contribute to particulate matter pollution. Successful pollution control depends on all sectors acting in unison. "We must keep an eye on the effect of an energy system that is increasingly decentralized. Small installations in inner cities may not produce more particulate matter pollution than modern large-scale power plants. In this regard Germany has made a significant step by tightening the provisions on small-scale firing installations", said Flasbarth.

Yet another factor independent of human activity is weather. In high pressure weather conditions, there is much less exchange of air, which can result in the air itself becoming poorer in quality if emissions from motor vehicles, heating systems or factories remain the same. There were several high-pressure weather episodes in 2011. Between January and March, and then in

November, the daily averages for particulate matter were exceeded more often than in previous years. The cause of this exceedence, however, owes to emissions that must be reduced at their source.

UBA will issue the final report on 2011 air quality in Germany in the first half of 2012 once the validated and complete data from the Federal Government and *Länder* have been evaluated.

Further information and links:

Interim report on 2011 air quality data:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/4211.html>

Publication on heating with wood (in German: *Heizen mit Holz*):

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/3151.html>

Current air quality data:

<http://www.env-it.de/umweltbundesamt/luftdaten/index.html?setLanguage=en>

UBA webpages: Air and Air Pollution Control:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/luft-e/index.htm>

Dessau-Roßlau, 6 February 2012