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Slight decline in particulate pollution

Limits for air pollutants nevertheless regularly exceeded

Nitrogen dioxide and particulates continue to impact air quality in Germany, according to interim measurement data for 2012 provided by the *Länder* and the Federal Environment Agency. Nitrogen dioxide pollution remains high. Median concentrations of particulates – measured in PM₁₀ – were at the same level in Germany in 2012 as in 2008 and thus well below the levels of the previous three years. The caps for particulates and nitrogen dioxide are still exceeded too often, in particular in cities and metropolitan areas. Says UBA President Flasbarth, "The new data on air quality in Germany show that we must further reduce air pollution. The European Year of Air 2013 which has just begun was launched by the European Commission in part because human health and our ecosystems are still not sufficiently protected. Successes in clean air policy may no longer be limited to industry and the transport sector. Since the many emissions reduction measures have had or have begun to show effect, emissions from small heating systems have become significant sources of air pollution. Intensive livestock breeding increases large-scale particulate pollution because of rising levels of ammonia output, and this is being felt in conurbations."

Particulate pollution in central Europe continues to reduce average life expectancy by almost half a year. Although air pollution in Germany has been reduced significantly since 1990, further efforts are necessary, especially as concerns particulates and nitrous oxides. These pollutants are emitted by motor vehicles and are also the product of combustion processes in industry and households for the generation of energy and heat. The rising numbers of freestanding stoves has been proven to add to particulate pollution in the winter months. Studies indicate a spike of up to five incidences of exceedence of the daily mean values. The EU target value for benzo[a]pyrene, which is 1 nanogram per cubic metre (ng/m³), was also exceeded repeatedly. This polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH) is a product of wood burning. The Länder track air quality nationwide at 643 monitoring stations.

The allowable annual mean for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) of 40 micrograms per cubic metre air (µg/m³) was exceeded at 52 per cent of urban stations located near traffic. In contrast, the PM₁₀ annual mean values for particulates, which is also 40 µg/m³, remained constant throughout Germany in 2012. Air pollution by particulates last year was one of the lowest since monitoring

began. Exceedences of daily mean values occurred mainly at monitoring stations located near traffic. Even when weather conditions were favourable, the values measured in 2012 at nearly 10 per cent of stations close to traffic were over the daily limit value for particulates. The parameter is considered exceeded if levels above 50 µg/m³ are measured on more than 35 days in a year.

"The development away from district heating towards more decentralised small heating systems in private homes and trade must not result in higher particulate pollution than that caused by modern, large-scale power plants. Germany has taken important steps to ensure this by introducing more stringent regulations for small firing installations", said Flasbarth. The Federal Environment Agency brochure on heating with wood (Heizen mit Holz) explains how emissions from wood-fired small heating systems can be reduced.

There is further need for action in areas where the air breathed by people is polluted by particulates and nitrogen dioxide; that is, in urban areas and conurbations. Traffic emissions in these areas can be reduced by Low Emission Zones. If the zones are operated with few exceptions and consistently at Level 3, which only allows entry with a green badge, they have a proven positive effect on air quality. Since over 80 per cent of cars and 50-60 per cent of commercial vehicles now get a green badge, low emission zones that still tolerate the yellow badge are showing no significant improvement.

Making further improvements to the air quality in conurbations will require reducing the large-scale pollution by the agricultural sector. UBA is supporting measures to revise the licensing procedures in intensive livestock breeding and to enforce good agricultural practice, which includes the rapid treatment of livestock manure.

Further information

Interim assessment of air quality data of 2012 (in German):

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/4421.html>

UBA will follow up with an assessment of air quality in Germany as soon as validated and complete data from the Federal and Länder air measurements networks have been received.

Year of Air 2013:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/luft-e/jahr-der-luft-2013.htm>

Current air quality data:

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

UBA Web pages "Air and Air Pollution Control":

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

Brochure on heating with wood (Heizen mit Holz):

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

Dessau-Roßlau, 6 February 2013