

Air Pollution

Overview

- The air we breathe contains small amounts of pollution generated from sources such as road traffic, industrial processes, domestic heating and cooking, and agriculture. Some pollution is also generated naturally, for example wind-blown dust and sea salt.
- Some pollution can travel long distances across countries and even continents.
- Pollution is normally dispersed effectively by the wind, but when winds are very light it can build up to higher levels.
- The amount of pollution in air is measured in micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$).
- Air pollution can make it harder to breathe, especially for people with existing respiratory problems. Even for healthy people it can have an impact on long-term health.

Impacts

When levels of air pollutants rise impacts may include:

Health impacts mainly affecting the respiratory and inflammatory systems. It is advised to consult the Public Health England website about health impacts from air pollutants.

Environmental effects including damage to plants and crops. A haze may also occur, usually over cities, reducing visibility. Stone buildings may show signs of erosion and become blackened.

Notable air quality events

August 2003 - A heat wave across Europe in the first two weeks of August 2003 was accompanied by high levels of the pollutant ozone.

5-9 December 1952 - A severe air-pollution event occurred in London, resulting in a significant increase in the death rate.

Air Pollution in the UK

Pollution levels outdoors can build up at any time of year when the weather is very settled and winds are light. In urban locations the most significant pollutants are nitrogen oxides and particulates. Close to roads, levels can be much higher. During the summer a gas called ozone can build up across the whole country and can cause elevated, widespread pollution levels, including in rural locations.

In general, air pollution in the UK does not rise to levels at which people need to make major changes to their behaviour or avoid going outdoors.



More information can be found at: www.naturalhazardspartnership.org.uk/hazards/air-pollution