

'A lifeline for dirty cars': EU backs new air pollution limits, but not until 2035

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- a. Which of these environmental issues is the biggest problem? Rank these issues from 1 (biggest problem) to 6 (smallest problem). Give reasons for your choices.

_____ lack of clean water

_____ lack of clean air

_____ fossil fuels

_____ plastic

_____ deforestation

_____ sea level rise

2 Key words

- a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to match the definitions below. Then, find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

boost

chair

committee

damage

excessive

limit

lungs

monitor

organ

spokesperson

substance

1. the greatest or smallest amount of something that is allowed _____
2. a type of solid, liquid, or gas with certain qualities _____
3. the two organs in your chest which allow you to breathe _____
4. the person in charge of a meeting or committee _____
5. a group of people chosen to make decisions about a specific topic _____
6. hurt or harm something _____
7. a part of the body that does a particular job _____
8. a person chosen to speak officially for a group or organisation _____
9. too much _____
10. increase or improve something _____
11. watch for particular things _____

'A lifeline for dirty cars': EU backs new air pollution limits, but not until 2035

Level 2: Intermediate

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. That organisation _____ the population of endangered animals.
2. There are _____ to time and money.
3. Smoking can lead to _____ disease.
4. There was a lot of _____ after the storm.
5. Do you really think those berries can _____ your immune system?
6. The company's _____ answered the journalists' questions.
7. Who will _____ the meeting while the project manager is away?

'A lifeline for dirty cars': EU backs new air pollution limits, but not until 2035

Level 2: Intermediate

Ajit Niranjana

13 September, 2023

- 1 The EU has voted to clean its air by setting tough limits. Experts say this will save lives and money.
- 2 The European Parliament agreed on Wednesday to limit several dangerous substances to levels put forward by the World Health Organization (WHO). But after centre-right politicians complained, it decided to push back the date for meeting the WHO's limits by five years.
- 3 "This is great news for all European citizens, especially the millions who live with lung conditions," said Zorana Jovanovic Andersen, an epidemiologist at the University of Copenhagen and chair of the European Respiratory Society's environment and health committee.
- 4 The vote "is an important step in the right direction towards clean air for all, even though the full alignment with the WHO was moved from 2030 to 2035," she said.
- 5 Almost everyone in Europe's urban areas breathes air which goes beyond the WHO's yearly level of 5 µg/m³. Known as PM2.5, these tiny pieces are small enough to pass into the blood. From there, they travel through the body and damage organs.
- 6 Scientists and doctors estimate that outdoor air pollution kills 300,000 people in Europe each year.
- 7 The update to the air quality law was passed by 363 votes in favour to 226 votes against. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) voted against the proposal.
- 8 "With this vote, there is a new risk of driving bans and even the closure of construction sites and industrial plants," said Peter Liese, a German MEP and the EPP's environmental spokesperson.
- 9 Most politicians supporting the law were acting irresponsibly, he said. "We will continue to fight against excessive measures." He believes that we should use technology, not bans, to improve air quality.
- 10 Margherita Tolotto, the policy manager for air and noise at the environmental non-profit European Environment Bureau said, "I do think they are a little bit more ashamed of contradicting air quality objectives because it's less sexy to go out in public and say: 'Hey, look, I'm lobbying for you to continue breathing polluted air.'"
- 11 As well as harming human health, dirty air holds back economies because governments have to spend more on healthcare and workers take more days off sick. The European Commission found in a report that meeting the WHO limits for PM2.5 by 2030 would boost the economy more than weaker rules would.
- 12 The researchers worked out the net yearly benefit to be 90 billion Euro if PM2.5 levels were limited to 15 µg/m³, and 123 billion Euro if they were brought down to 5 µg/m³.
- 13 The approved proposal wants better monitoring of air pollution and easier access to information. It also gives people greater rights to receive money and treatment if their governments do not meet the limits.
- 14 Zachary Azdad, the vehicles policy officer at the non-profit Transport & Environment, said the law was a step in the right direction but that "delaying alignment with the WHO will cost lives because of years of avoidable air pollution". He also said that this vote won't speed up creating more low- and zero-emissions zones in Europe.
- 15 Air pollution was the fourth biggest risk factor for early death globally in 2019. Only blood pressure, smoking and diet played greater roles.
- 16 "The other three you have control over," said Barbara Hoffman, an environmental epidemiologist at the University of Düsseldorf. "But you cannot decide yourself the air that you're breathing."

© Guardian News and Media 2023
First published in *The Guardian*, 13/09/2023

'A lifeline for dirty cars': EU backs new air pollution limits, but not until 2035

Level 2: Intermediate

3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What did the EU vote to do?
2. When does the EU have to meet the WHO's limits?
3. How does Zorana Jovanovic Andersen feel about the news?
4. What is the WHO's yearly guideline for the tiny particles known as PM2.5?
5. Why is PM2.5 harmful?
6. What is the estimate for how many people are killed because of air pollution in Europe each year?
7. How many people voted for and against the air quality law?
8. What is Peter Liese's argument against the law?
9. How much money (in Euros) would be added to the economy each year with PM2.5 levels at 15 µg/m³? And at 5 µg/m³?
10. According to the article, what are the four most significant risk factors for early death globally?

4 Key language

a. Match each phrasal verb to its definition. All the phrasal verbs used are in the article.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. put forward | a. delay |
| 2. push back | b. calculate an answer or develop something successfully |
| 3. hold back | c. move or make something happen faster |
| 4. work out | d. suggest something to discuss |
| 5. speed up | e. stop someone or something from moving forward |

b. Complete the sentences using the correct phrasal verb above.

1. I need to _____ the meeting till this afternoon.
2. The manager really liked the ideas our team _____.
3. The racing car _____ to take first place in the race.
4. The maths teacher asked her students to _____ the answers to the equations.
5. The film was so sad that I was _____ tears.

'A lifeline for dirty cars': EU backs new air pollution limits, but not until 2035

Level 2: Intermediate

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Dirty air is worse than dirty water."
- "Waiting until 2035 for these limits is irresponsible."
- "Everyone has a right to clear air and water."

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about air pollution.

- Why does it happen?
- What is your government doing to solve the problem? Is it working? Why do you think so?
- What are some ideas for how to slow, stop, or reverse it?
- Which idea(s) do you think are the best to fix the problem?

b. Report your findings to the class. Share the facts you learned, the public's and your opinion. You can express your ideas using some of the expressions below.

According to the data/research, ...

This has happened as a result of / due to ...

The government proposed/passed...

The facts/data showed ...

The proposal/law/guidelines state ...

Public opinion is ...

The most popular viewpoint is ...

The majority / A minority of people think ...

They agree to / They disagree on ...

People are (not) certain that ...