

News Release
1 February 2024

Scotland must tighten air quality standards says new report from Environmental Standards Scotland

Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) is calling for a tightening of the air pollution limits for particulate matter (PM) (currently set out in the Air Quality Standards (Scotland) Regulations 2010) to safeguard the population's health.

ESS released the findings of its 'Particulate matter in Scotland – an assessment of the evidence, ambition and prospects' report today (1 February 2024) looking into the amount of particulate matter in Scotland's air. Particulate matter is a very small collection of solid or liquid matter in the air, which is harmful to humans and the environment.

The report was prepared by ESS following the publication of new guidance by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2021, advising that more stringent limits for particulate matter should be introduced to safeguard public health.

ESS' analysis sets out that Scotland, along with most other countries, does not currently meet the new WHO guidelines advised for particulate matter and recommends legal targets are tightened.

The European Union is already proposing a tightening of limits and the Scottish Government will need to take action if it wants to maintain alignment with European legislation.

Mark Roberts, Chief Executive of ESS, said: “Scotland has made significant progress in recent decades in reducing emissions of particulate matter and is currently largely meeting its objectives and limit values for concentrations of particulate matter.

“However, the scientific evidence has strengthened about the damage to human health caused by particulate matter. This is why it is important that the Scottish Government updates the limits for particulate matter in Scotland to reflect this evidence.

“Emissions from transport have rightly been the focus of recent decades. Attention now needs to be widened to include other sectors. Our analysis concludes that emissions from industry, agriculture and residential combustion now need attention to make further improvements.”

-- Ends --

Notes to editors

i) You can read the full report here: <https://environmentalstandards.scot/publications/particulate-matter-in-scotland-an-assessment-of-the-evidence-ambition-and-prospects/>

ii) **Particulate matter** (PM) is one form of air pollution. It describes a very small collection of matter, either solid or liquid. There are currently standards set for PM₁₀, (those with diameter up to 10 micrometres (µm) in diameter) and PM_{2.5}, (those with diameter up to 2.5 µm). Particulate Matter may be emitted, or released, as a primary pollutant already in its PM form (e.g. as carbon from combustion or dust from industrial abrasion). Alternatively, it may be created in the atmosphere as a secondary pollutant from emissions of other primary pollutants (e.g. ammonia from agriculture and sulphates from shipping). Please see pages 7 – 10 in the report for more information on PM.

iii) For more information, please contact ess@smarts.agency | 07866 694 021

iv) About Environmental Standards Scotland

Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) is a public sector body, set up as a non-ministerial office, independent of Scottish Government, and accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

ESS has been set up to ensure environmental laws and standards are adhered to in Scotland, replacing the European Union's scrutiny and enforcement role after Brexit. Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) was established in law by the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021.

ESS' role is to scrutinise, investigate and secure improvements in public authorities' compliance with environmental law, the effectiveness of environmental law, and the way it is being implemented and applied in Scotland.

All public authorities are covered, including the Scottish Government and its agencies, as well as organisations carrying out functions on behalf of public authorities.

A broad range of environmental law is covered, including all aspects of environmental protection and harm, particularly in relation human beings and their enjoyment of the environment.

Our Board operates under Standing Orders and we have a Framework agreement with the Scottish Government.

For more information: Visit [environmentalstandards.scot](https://www.environmentalstandards.scot)