

Ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe.

Recast

2022/0347(COD) - 26/10/2022 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to simplify and consolidate the directives on ambient air quality.

PROPOSED ACT: Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: clean air is essential to human health and sustaining the environment. Major improvements in air quality have been achieved in the European Union over the past three decades, thanks to joint efforts by the EU and national, regional and local authorities in the Member States to reduce the adverse impacts of air pollution. However, about 300 000 premature deaths per year and a significant number of non-communicable diseases such as asthma, cardiovascular problems and lung cancer are attributed to air pollution. Air pollution continues to be the number one environmental cause of early death in the EU with the worst pollutants being particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide and ozone. Polluted air also harms the environment causing acidification, eutrophication and damage to forests, ecosystems and crops.

The last update to the Ambient Air Quality Directives (2008/50/EC and 2004/107/EC) dates back to 2008. Since then, new scientific evidence about the health impacts of air pollution has become available. The revised WHO Air Quality Guidelines published in September 2021 recommend introducing stricter air quality standards.

PURPOSE: after more than a decade of implementing Directive 2008/50/EC and Directive 2004/107/EC in parallel, the revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives provides an opportunity to incorporate the latest scientific knowledge and experience with implementation by merging them into a single Directive. This will consolidate air quality legislation, while simplifying rules applying to relevant authorities, enhancing overall consistency and clarity, and thus making implementation more efficient.

Amendments made through this proposal to **merge the current Ambient Air Quality Directives** (2008/50/EC and 2004/107/EC) aim to consolidate and simplify the legislation.

In particular, the recast Directive:

- introduces the 2050 zero pollution objective for air quality to ensure that, by 2050, air quality is so improved that pollution is no longer considered harmful to human health and the environment;
- provides for a **regular review** of scientific evidence to check whether the air quality standards in force are still sufficient to protect human health and the environment, and whether additional air pollutants should be regulated. The first review will take place by the end of 2028, with the objective in particular to ensuring full alignment with WHO recommendations;
- supports local authorities by strengthening the provisions on air quality **monitoring, modelling, and improved air quality plans**;

- replaces the current lower and upper assessment threshold with a single assessment threshold per pollutant;
- updates and clarifies rules for the **number and location of sampling points**, including stricter rules for relocating sampling points;
- introduces a new provision requiring a **reduction, by more than half, in public's average exposure to fine particulate matter** (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) at regional level (NUTS 1 territorial units), towards the levels recommended by the WHO;
- introduces **alert thresholds** for short-term measures on peak pollution from particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), in addition to the existing alert thresholds for nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and sulphur dioxide (SO2), given the significant health impacts of particulate matter pollution;
- establishes an effective right for people to be **compensated** where damage to their health has occurred wholly or partially as a result of a violation of rules prescribed on limit values, air quality plans, short-term action plans or in relation to transboundary pollution;
- brings more clarity on access to **justice**, effective penalties, and better public information on air quality.