# Ambient air quality: limit values for sulphur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead

1997/0266(SYN) - 22/04/1999 - Final act

PURPOSE: to lay down limit values and, as appropriate, alert thresholds, for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead in ambient air in order to avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment; to assess concentrations of these substances on the basis of common methods and criteria; to obtain adequate information and to ensure that it is made available to the public; and to maintain ambient air quality where it is good and improve it in other cases. COMMUNITY MEASURE: Council Directive 1999/30/EC relating to limit values for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead in ambient air. CONTENT: in accordance with the 1996 Framework Directive on air quality (Directive 96/62/EC), this Directive sets down limit values for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead in ambient air. The new limit values, which are accompanied by a timetable and a cost/benefit analysis, are based on air quality guidelines adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1996. The main provisions of the Directive are as follows: 1) Sulphur dioxide ($SO_2$): the Directive sets limit values for human health to be met by 01/01/2005 and a limit value for the protection of ecosystems to be met by 19 /07/2001. It also lays down the alert threshold for sulphur dioxide (500 g/m3 measured over three consecutive hours at locations representative over at least 100 km2). The public has to be informed in the event of this threshold being exceeded. 2) Nitrogen dioxide ($NO_2$) and oxides of nitrogen ($NO_x$): the Directive sets the limit values for the protection of human health (the hourly limit value is set at 200 g/m3, not to be exceeded a calendar year). These values will have to be met by 01/01/2010 at the latest. It also sets an annual limit value for the protection of vegetation (30 g/m3 $NO_x$), to be met by 19/07/2001. The Directive lays down an alert threshold for nitrogen dioxide (400 g/m3 measured over three consecutive hours at locations representative of air quality over at least 100 km2). 3) Particulate matter (PM10): limit values for human health are laid down for 2005 and, for indicative purposes, 2010. In stage 1, the daily limit value for the protection of human health is 50 g/m3 which cannot be exceeded more than 35 times a calendar year. No provisions are made at this stage with respect to the PM2,5, given that it is intended that the re-examination planned for 2003 will deal specifically with this point; It should be noted, with respect to particulates, that Member States will only be required to intervene in regard to exceedances that are not a result of natural events (volcanic eruptions, seismic activities, geothermal activities, high wind events, etc.), provided that they provide the necessary justifications to the Commission. 4) Lead: the annual limit value for the protection of human health is set at 0,5 g/m3. This limit value has to be met by 01/01/2005, or 01/01/2010 in the immediate proximity of specific sources situated on sites contaminated by decades of industrial activities. The Directive also requires the Member States to ensure that up-to-date information on ambient concentrations of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead is routinely made available to the public, as well as to the appropriate environmental protection organisations. No later than 31/12/2003, the Commission will submit to the European Parliament and the Council, a report concerning the implementation of the Directive, bearing in mind the latest results of scientific research. ENTRY INTO FORCE: 19/07/1999. DEADLINE FIXED FOR TRANSPOSITION: 19 /07/2001.