

Air Quality Standards

Humans can be adversely affected by exposure to air pollutants in ambient air. In response, the European Union has developed an extensive body of legislation which establishes health based standards and objectives for a number of pollutants present in the air. These standards and objectives are summarised in the table below. These apply over differing periods of time because the observed health impacts associated with the various pollutants occur over different exposure times.

Pollutant	Concentration	Averaging period	Legal nature	Permitted exceedences each year
Fine particles (PM2.5)	25 µg/m3***	1 year	Target value to be met as of 1.1.2010 Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2015	n/a
Sulphur dioxide (SO2)	350 µg/m3	1 hour	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2005	24
	125 µg/m3	24 hours	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2005	3
Nitrogen dioxide (NO2)	200 µg/m3	1 hour	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2010	18
	40 µg/m3	1 year	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2010 *	n/a
PM10	50 µg/m3	24 hours	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2005 **	35
	40 µg/m3	1 year	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2005 **	n/a
Lead (Pb)	0.5 µg/m3	1 year	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2005 (or 1.1.2010 in the immediate vicinity of specific, notified industrial sources; and a 1.0 µg/m3 limit value applied from 1.1.2005 to 31.12.2009)	n/a
Carbon monoxide (CO)	10 mg/m3	Maximum daily 8 hour mean	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2005	n/a
Benzene	5 µg/m3	1 year	Limit value to be met as of 1.1.2010**	n/a
Ozone	120 µg/m3	Maximum daily 8 hour mean	Target value to be met as of 1.1.2010	25 days averaged over 3 years
Arsenic (As)	6 ng/m3	1 year	Target value to be met as of 31.12.2012	n/a
Cadmium (Cd)	5 ng/m3	1 year	Target value to be met as of 31.12.2012	n/a
Nickel (Ni)	20 ng/m3	1 year	Target value to be met as of 31.12.2012	n/a
Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons	1 ng/m3 (expressed as concentration of Benzo(a)pyrene)	1 year	Target value to be met as of 31.12.2012	n/a

*Under Directive 2008/50/EU, the Member State could apply for an extension of up to five years (i.e. maximum up to 2015) in a specific zone. The request is subject to an assessment by the Commission. In such cases within the time extension period the limit value applies at the level of the limit value + maximum margin of tolerance (48 µg/m3 for annual NO2 limit value).

**Under Directive 2008/50/EU, the Member State was able to apply for an extension until three years after the date of entry into force of the new Directive (i.e. May 2011) in a specific zone. The request was subject to assessment by the Commission. In such cases within the time extension period the limit value applies at the level of the limit value + maximum margin of tolerance (35 days at 75µg/m3 for daily PM10 limit value, 48 µg/m3 for annual Pm10 limit value).

***Standard introduced by Directive.

Under EU law a limit value is legally binding from the date it enters into force subject to any exceedances permitted by the legislation. For a target value the obligation is to take all necessary measures not entailing disproportionate costs to ensure that it is attained, and so it is less strict than a limit value.

Directive 2008/50/EC introduced additional PM2.5 objectives targeting the **exposure** of the population to fine particles. These objectives are set at national level and are based on the average exposure indicator (AEI). This is determined as a 3-year running annual mean PM2.5 concentration averaged over the selected monitoring stations in agglomerations and larger urban areas, set in urban background locations to best assess the PM2.5 exposure of the general population.

Title	Metric	Averaging period	Legal nature	Permitted exceedences each year
PM2.5 Exposure concentration obligation	20 µg/m3 (AEI)	Based on 3 year average	Legally binding in 2015 (years 2013,2014,2015)	n/a
PM2.5 Exposure reduction target	Percentage reduction* + all measures to reach 18 µg/m3 (AEI)	Based on 3 year average	Reduction to be attained where possible in 2020, determined on the basis of the value of exposure indicator in 2010	n/a

* Depending on the value of AEI in 2010, a percentage reduction requirement (0,10,15, or 20%) is set in the Directive. If AEI in 2010 is assessed to be over 22 µg/m3, all appropriate measures need to be taken to achieve 18 µg/m3 by 2020.