



Air Quality, Plastics and Recycling

CIEH Budget 2017 Briefing

CIEH is a charity and professional membership body for Environmental Health Professionals across the country.

We have a heritage of more than 130 years and our purpose is to help our members and the wider profession achieve the objective of enabling safer, cleaner and healthier environments for the benefit of people, businesses and local communities.

Overview

This budget is an opportunity for the Chancellor to show that he is serious about tackling some of the vital issues around environmental and public health in the United Kingdom.

The key issues of growing concern are the deteriorating state of air quality in our cities, the impact of mass plastic consumption on our environment, and the need to improve recycling in our communities.

Key Points

- Good air quality is a basic requirement and determinant of health.
- The failure of the UK to meet legislative and, arguably, more importantly WHO standards, has led to increased hospital admissions, placing excess burden on the NHS.
- In the UK, over 800 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) exist where pollutant levels exceed legislative standards. With some of these standards set at twice the World Health Organisation acceptable levels it is clear that air quality is a significant public health issue.
- Poor outdoor air quality results in around 40,000 premature deaths annually in the UK.
- In the UK, air pollution costs businesses and health care services in excess of £20 billion annually.

- The unsustainable and growing consumption of plastics in our society is a grave threat to our health as it has now entered our food chains.

Air Quality

With air quality spanning a wide range of policy areas it is clear that everyone has a role to play in improving air quality.

There is evidence of the contribution of poor air quality to illnesses such as cancer, stroke, asthma, and heart disease, and there are also strong associations with obesity, dementia, and diabetes, all of which are chronic illnesses on the increase in the UK. The effects are especially evident in vulnerable people such as children, the elderly, and those with existing cardio-vascular and respiratory issues.

Whilst higher socio-economic groups are also exposed to poor air quality, the impact on these groups is far less than on lower status groups, making air quality a matter of social injustice.

Furthermore, the majority of vehicular journeys are undertaken by people in the top 20% of income groups, with the health impacts of these journeys adversely and disproportionately affecting those in the bottom 20% of income groups. It therefore follows that improvements in air quality can result in narrowing of inequalities in health.

Plastics and Recycling

The problem of mass and unsustainable plastic consumption in our society is fast becoming a crisis. Recent reports have shown that the amount of rubbish found in British waters has soared by more than 150 per cent in a year, with almost 80 per cent of the refuse found on the seabed being plastics.

Defra has now stated that this is likely to get worse.

Contamination of the natural environment with plastics can have a range of negative effects on marine life, including species important in commercial fisheries, as well as on maritime industries and infrastructure. In addition, there is emerging evidence of effects on human well-being.

There are growing concerns that the food chain is now being affected, following research showing that on average 60 % of shellfish in the sea around Kent are already contaminated with micro-plastics.

The repercussions for the very food that we eat, and subsequently our health, could be serious.

Recycling as a way to begin to tackle the spread of plastics has many benefits, such as reducing the quantity of waste that needs to be managed by other approaches, such as landfill, or that has the potential to enter the environment as litter. It also reduces the requirement for fossil oil and gas to manufacture new plastics.

What Needs to Happen

In order to begin tackling the very real impact of worsening air quality and plastic consumption on environmental and public health, we are calling on the Chancellor to:

1. Remove the current tax advantage on red diesel
2. Ensure that Year 1 VED advantages are removed from non Euro VI diesels
3. Introduce a centrally funded scrappage scheme for non Euro VI diesels
4. Increase tax on diesel fuel whilst reducing fuel duty for petrol vehicles
5. Introduce a 5 pence tax on coffee cups, with revenue ring fenced to aid research into recyclable alternatives
6. Provide financial support for measures to reduce wider plastic consumption and promote environmental clean-up across the UK

How You Can Help

We believe that it is imperative that the Chancellor looks to address these issues as an essential priority. As such, we are calling on MPs and Peers to raise these concerns in the Budget debates, and with the Chancellor directly.

We would be very happy to draft any content, or provide further information, to support your parliamentary activities around air quality, plastics, and the Budget, so please do let us know.

Contact

For any further information, please contact:

Ross Matthewman
Public Affairs and PR Manager
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health
r.matthewman@cieh.org