



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP  
Secretary of State for Environment,  
Food and Rural Affairs

Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

T 03459 335577  
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk  
[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

Iain Stewart MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Our ref: MC2020/06299/JA

11 May 2020

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your letter of 11 March on behalf of your constituents, about air pollution and health, which refers to the British Heart Foundation's research and their recent campaign calling for the Government to adopt the World Health Organization's (WHO) air quality limits in law to protect the nation's health. I apologise for the delay in responding. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to the COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

Air pollution is the single greatest environmental risk to human health. Although air pollution has reduced significantly since 2010, we know there is more to do. We welcome the work that the British Heart Foundation is doing to increase understanding about air pollution and health, and we have engaged constructively with them to develop policies to improve air quality.

Last year we published our world-leading Clean Air Strategy (CAS), which included new and ambitious goals, legislation, investment and policies which will help us to clean up our air faster and more effectively. The Strategy was welcomed by the WHO as "*an example for the rest of the world to follow*". Taking the action set out in the CAS will improve air quality and reduce the incidence of serious illness, improving quality of life for tens of thousands of people. We are working hard now to implement these commitments. All of the action we are taking to improve air quality will benefit the public's health.

Building on the commitments set out in the CAS, the Government has introduced air quality measures in the landmark Environment Bill which was introduced to Parliament on 30 January. The Bill delivers key parts of the Strategy and aims to deliver health benefits by tackling pollution, which is the greatest environmental risk to our health.

The Bill establishes a legally binding duty to set a target for fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> refers to tiny particles or droplets in the air that are two and one half microns or less in width), in addition to a framework for setting legally binding environmental targets, including a long-term target on air quality. We are committed to setting a challenging target for reducing PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations, with a primary focus on reducing the public health impacts this pollutant causes.

In July 2019, we published a report assessing the progress that will be made towards WHO PM<sub>2.5</sub> air quality guidelines with actions outlined in the CAS by 2030. This report showed that significant progress would be made towards achieving WHO guideline levels through the actions outlined in the Strategy, but that additional action would be needed to reach WHO Guidelines levels in specific locations (i.e. central London).

Moving forward, we need to ensure that targets are based on realistic pathways, robust science and full economic analysis to ensure that while they are ambitious, they are also achievable and affordable. We will ensure that stakeholders, Parliament and the public will have the opportunity to comment on, and input into, the process of developing this target.

Furthermore, the Bill proposes to create a new requirement for retailers of solid fuels to notify customers of the change in law regarding the purchase of certain solid fuels. The Bill also removes the limit on the fine for the current offence for delivering these fuels to a building in a smoke control area. This is intended to help raise consumer awareness and improve compliance.

We are also taking action beyond the Bill. For example, we recently announced plans to phase out the sale of the most polluting solid fuels. It is our intention that these new proposals will come into force in England from February 2021. We are working to ensure only the cleanest new stoves are available for sale by 2022, raising the standards of new appliances across the whole country.

I hope you are reassured that improving air quality is a top priority for the Government and that action is being taken to ensure the air across the UK is safer to breathe.



**RT HON GEORGE EUSTICE MP**