



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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## **DIRECTIVE ON AIR QUALITY STANDARDS**

The Council today adopted a directive aimed at improving ambient air quality across Europe<sup>1</sup> ([3696/1/07](#) and [7690/1/08 ADD1](#)).

The directive stresses the importance to combat emissions of pollutants at source and to identify and implement emission reduction measures at local, national and Community level.

More specifically, the directive lays down measures aimed at :

- establishing objectives for ambient air quality designed to avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and on the environment;
- assessing the ambient air quality in the EU on the basis of common methods and criteria;

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<sup>1</sup> The decision was taken without debate at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting. The directive is deemed adopted after the approval by the Council of all the amendments voted by the European Parliament in second reading of the codecision procedure.

# **P R E S S**

- obtaining information on ambient air quality in order to monitor long-term trends and improvements, and ensuring that such information is made available to the public;
- maintaining air quality where it is good and improving it in other cases;
- promoting increased cooperation between EU countries in reducing air pollution.

The new measures have been designed to combat emissions of harmful air pollutants taking into account latest health and scientific developments and the experience gained, as well as relevant World Health Organisation standards, guidelines and programmes.

While covering all major air pollutants, the directive pays special attention to particulates and ground-level ozone pollution because of their danger for human health. The new provisions seek to achieve a general reduction of concentrations of fine particulates, known as PM<sub>2.5</sub>, in the urban background in order to ensure that large sections of the population benefit from improved air quality.

The new directive is also intended to provide with more clarity, simplification and efficiency by replacing five existing legal instruments: the directive on ambient air quality assessment and management (96/62/EC); the directive on limit values for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead (1999/30/EC); the directive on limit values for benzene and carbon monoxide (2000/69/EC); the directive on ozone (2002/3/EC); and the decision on exchange of information from stations measuring ambient air pollution (97/101/EC).

The directive is part of the thematic strategy on air pollution which aims at reducing the number of premature deaths from air pollution-related diseases by 40% by 2020 from the 2000 level, as well as reducing damage to forests and ecosystems from airborne pollutants.