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How clean is air in Germany?

Nitrogen dioxide levels exceeded set limits

A first assessment of the air quality in 2010 done by the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) indicates that at 56 percent of the measuring stations in urban areas near traffic, the nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentration levels exceeded the annual mean value of 40 microgammas/cubic metre of air (µg/m³) which has been set as the statutory cap since 1.1.2010. The assessment is based on preliminary data from the federal states' and UBA's measuring networks. "There is a need for action in the area of nitrogen dioxide. Exceedence of nitrogen dioxide threshold values occurs mainly in cities and congested urban areas; that is, where most people also live," said UBA President Jochen Flasbarth. The main sources of nitrous oxides are the transport sector and the incineration processes of industry and households. Compared to the past decade, nitrogen dioxide pollution remained similarly high in 2010.

Concentrations of particulates (PM₁₀) in 2010 again exceeded the caps which already became effective in 2005. 13% of all measuring stations registered PM₁₀ concentrations of over 50 µg/m³ on more than 35 days. Moreover, the levels measured at the Stuttgart Neckartor and Reutlingen Lederstraße Ost measuring sites did not comply with the annual mean PM₁₀ limit of 40 µg/m³. In sum, particulate pollution in 2010 was slightly higher than in the previous three years.

UBA's President is pleading for more action, saying, "The introduction of environmental zones was a crucial step to counteract particulate pollution. Environmental zones must be implemented so as to increase their effectiveness." Furthermore, Flasbarth calls for the following necessary measures: "Transport design more strongly focused on local public transport and promotion of pedestrian and bicycle traffic in many cities and towns can make a difference in the quest for clean air." UBA believes that potential to reduce pollutant emissions can be tapped in the short term from short-distance inner city passenger car trips. Flasbarth commented, "By walking, cycling or using local public transport we can ensure improved air quality as well as less noise." An interim assessment of 2010 air quality data, also a comparison to previous years, is available on the Internet at <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4063.html>.

Current air quality information on the Internet: <http://www.env-it.de/umweltbundesamt/luftdaten/index.html?setLanguage=en>

Answers to frequently asked questions about nitrous oxides (in German):
<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/luft/schadstoffe/no.htm>

Dessau-Roßlau, 1 February 2011