

European petition demands government action to slash toxic coal deaths

4 April 2017, Brussels, Belgium

Effective air pollution limits could save more than 20,000 lives every year, yet some national governments are threatening to veto EU measures to tackle toxic pollution.

A [European petition launched today](#) calls on governments to protect citizens' health and the environment by adopting a European environmental standards document called the 'revised LCP BREF'. The petition also demands that governments protect their citizens' health by imposing strict limits on toxic pollution from coal.

A recent report [1] has shown how new pollution limits could help **reduce the annual number of premature deaths caused by burning coal from 22,900 to 2,600 deaths.**

The new standards are the result of years of negotiations between government, industry and NGO representatives. Their adoption was expected to be a formality but pressure from industry has led various Member States to threaten to veto the new rules at the final hurdle. [2]

Major European environmental groups the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and WWF have teamed up with campaigning organisation WeMove.EU to launch the petition. The petition is available in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Polish, it will be delivered to national governments a week before a crucial vote by national governments at an EU Committee meeting on April 28.

[1] See: [Lifting Europe's Dark Cloud: How cutting coal saves lives & country-specific factsheets.](#)

[2] [A leaked letter](#) revealed that a group of five countries wrote to Commissioner Vella in September last year demanding that the revised LCP BREF be further delayed. Ministers from the UK, Poland, Czech Republic, Finland and Greece wrote that there was a need to avoid a "disproportionate financial cost or technical burden on industry". Yet updating the standards is already more than two years behind schedule and the delay in implementing them has already led to more than 54,000 additional deaths and almost €150 billion in associated health costs - a burden on taxpayers all over Europe. In fact, the public benefits will be significantly higher because the standards will also apply to more than 2,000 other non-coal Large Combustion Plants in the EU and will also set stricter discharge limits for water pollutants.

QUOTES

Christian Schaible, Policy Manager (EEB) and member of the group that provided technical advice on the new standards

“The tried-and-tested techniques described in the document have been demonstrated as technically and economically viable in plants across Europe for many years. In terms of pollution reduction, this is much more like ‘using the wheel’ than trying to reinvent it. Given the serious cost of inaction on this issue, it is scandalous that certain governments may attempt to block these evidence-based standards that are designed to protect the health of their citizens and the environment.”

Julia Gogolewska, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

“The health damage resulting from coal fumes today is neither necessary nor inevitable because the means to reduce this pollution already exist. The new regulation will finally require polluters to bear some of the costs that are currently forced on society in the form of illness, health services and lifetime lost.”

Joanna Flisowska, Coal Policy Coordinator at Climate Action Network (CAN Europe)

“The health of citizens cannot wait to see the enforcement of stricter air pollution standards on burning coal. EU Governments need to take responsibility and set new pollution limits to protect their citizens and environment. This is an imperative first step while the ultimate goal should be to phase out coal and switch to clean renewable energy and energy efficiency.”

Darek Urbaniak, Senior Energy Policy Officer at WWF European Policy Office

“The EU does not need to reinvent the wheel. Legislation that can help improve the health of EU citizens affected by coal power is ready and waiting. It is now up to EU leaders to demonstrate political courage and take responsibility for adopting and implementing it swiftly.”

Q & A

What is the LCP BREF?

The European Union’s Industrial Emissions Directive aims to reduce the environmental impact of large industry by ensuring the use of best available techniques for environmental performance. These techniques are detailed in sector-specific technical documents called BREFs. The ‘Large Combustion Plant’ (LCP) BREF outlines the best available techniques for big power stations with a rated thermal input equal to or greater than 50 MW. It sets emission ranges for various pollutants associated with the use of Best Available Techniques (BAT) for combustion of various types of fuel.

The limits set in the LCP BREF will be legally binding and Member States will be required to set emission limits based on what is described in the document.

Who wrote the LCP BREF?

It was drafted following a data and evidence gathering process involving stakeholders from the European Commission, Member States, environmental NGOs and industry itself. The LCP BREF is based on emissions data from back in 2010 that has been checked by Member States and the final document represents an attempt to find consensus between all parties based upon evidence of what is “technically and economically” achievable.

What type of pollution will be reduced by the LCP BREF?

The LCP BREF contains revised levels for emissions of NO_x, SO₂ and PM into the air as well as, for the first time, mercury. If strictly implemented across the EU, the resulting emissions reductions could save more than 20,000 lives every year from coal pollution alone. The LCP BREF also updates the water pollution discharge levels for hazardous pollutants like cadmium and mercury.

How does coal pollution affect our health?

Burning coal produces large quantities of various harmful substances. Nitrous oxides (NO_x), sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and tiny particulate matter (PM) are pumped into the air. Coal pollution negatively affects human health in a number of ways, including contributing to the development of serious conditions such as chronic bronchitis, asthma, heart disease and strokes. The World Health Organisation described air pollution as “the world’s largest single environmental health risk” and estimates it is responsible for one in eight of all deaths worldwide. Heavy metals -such as very hazardous cadmium and mercury are also discharged directly into waters, accumulating in the food supply chain.

Why launch a petition now?

The LCP BREF is an extremely important document with huge potential to force the largest EU industrial polluters to clean up or shut down. The process that designs new environmental standards for industry was supposed to be depoliticised, led by experts and based on facts. Sadly, the entire process has been subject to immense pressure from industry lobbyists and even now as the final document is agreed - years behind schedule - polluting industry and even [some Member States](#) are openly attempting a last-gasp effort to stop the document ever being adopted.

Wouldn't it be better to close coal plants than install costly pollution-reducing technology?

In almost all cases - yes! Alongside causing poisonous air pollution, coal is also a major cause of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, one of the leading contributors to global warming. Closing coal power plants should be a priority for any government serious about their Paris Climate Agreement commitments, and closing those that are having a dangerous impact on our health and are unable to comply with the revised LCP BREF is a common sense priority.

How will the LCP BREF affect my country?

The extent to which the LCP BREF will reduce pollution in any given country depends on how strictly the document is implemented by national governments and its permit writers. If the most ambitious levels are followed there is significant potential to reduce harmful pollution everywhere. As part of the [Lifting Europe's Dark Cloud Report](#), we produced [country-specific information](#) about the impact of the LCP BREF on air-related coal pollution across Europe.



Where can I find the revised LCP BREF, what is the current status?

The current LCP BREF review process started at the end of October 2011 and should have been completed by August 2014. Due to various delays being pushed by both industry and Member States seeking to resist tougher standards, it has taken until now to schedule to vote: now set for 28 April 2017. The European Commission have published [the most recent draft](#) of this highly technical document on their website. The BAT-Conclusions (binding) part adopted is available [here](#).

What do the NGOs think about the proposed BREF limits of the revised LCP BREF?

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) took part in the stakeholder meetings that fed into the Commission's final draft for the revised LCP BREF. During this process the EEB demanded stricter BREF levels based on the evidence brought to the table. The current levels (upper BREF limits) for existing coal/lignite plants reflect levels negotiated by polluting industry, **not** what is achievable by using the best current techniques. For more information see detailed [EEB](#) and [Greenpeace](#) demands.

About the organisations behind the petition

WeMove.EU is a citizens' movement, campaigning for a better Europe; for a European Union committed to social and economic justice, environmental sustainability and citizen-led democracy. We are people from all walks of life, who call Europe our home – whether we were born in Europe or elsewhere.

The European Environmental Bureau is the largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations in Europe. It currently consists of over 150 member organisations in more than 30 countries (virtually all EU Member States plus some accession and neighbouring countries), including a growing number of European networks, and representing some 15 million individual members and supporters. The EEB stand for environmental justice, sustainable development and participatory democracy. Our aim is to ensure the EU secures a healthy environment and rich biodiversity for all.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is a leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union (EU). We demonstrate how policy changes can help protect health and enhance people's quality of life. HEAL has more than 70 member organisations, representing networks of health professionals, non-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth and environmental experts working at the international, EU, national and local level. Together, we help to bring independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making processes.



WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption

The European Policy Office contributes to the achievement of WWF's global mission by leading the WWF network to shape EU policies impacting on the European and global environment.

Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe is Europe's largest coalition working on climate and energy issues. With over 130 member organisations in more than 30 European countries - representing over 44 million citizens - CAN Europe works to prevent dangerous climate change and promote sustainable climate and energy policy in Europe.