



France's air pollution causes 48 000 deaths a year

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Air pollution in France is responsible for 48 000 deaths a year, the country's new public health agency has said.

Figures from Santé Publique France showed the effects of pollution from fine particles, mainly from vehicle exhausts.¹ Researchers estimated levels of fine particulate matter in 36 219 communities in France and looked at the effect on life expectancy. The agency was created in April this year from a merger of France's three national public health bodies focusing on public health surveillance, emergencies, and health promotion and prevention.

The research showed that 30 year olds living in a busy urban area with a population of more than 100 000 people would see their life expectancy reduce by around 15 months on average, if compared with a "no pollution" scenario. A 30 year old living in an area with 2000 to 100 000 inhabitants would see his or her life expectancy reduce by an average of 10 months. And even those living in rural areas are affected by pollution, the agency warned, seeing a reduction in life expectancy of nine months.

It said that, if towns and cities were able to reach the levels of fine particulate matter seen in the 5% of areas with the lowest pollution, 34 000 deaths could be prevented each year.

The report also looked at 17 towns in France from 2007 to 2010 that had experienced peaks in pollution, to see whether

experiencing a high level of pollution for a short time was particularly detrimental to health. However, it concluded, "It is daily, long-term exposure to pollution which has the biggest impact on health, [as] peaks of pollution have a marginal effect."

François Bourdillon, director of Santé Publique France, told France's *Libération* newspaper that the effects of air pollution were not an exaggeration.

"The results we are publishing are rather low estimates," he said. "What is certain is that there are deaths [due to air pollution], they are certainly invisible, but deaths nonetheless. We don't see it, but air pollution leads to heart and lung disease, and this link can no longer be contested."

The agency called for a number of measures to reduce pollution, including the introduction of vehicle tolls, increased use of bicycles, and a reduction in industrial emissions.

In March 2014 the French government ordered driving restrictions in Paris after pollution reached high levels. Owners whose cars had an odd number plate were allowed to drive on one day, and those with even numbers drove the next day.

1 Santé Public France. Impacts de l'exposition chronique aux particules fines sur la mortalité en France continentale [Impact of chronic exposure to fine particles on mortality in mainland France]. (Full report in French.) Jun 2016. <http://bit.ly/28P2ux2>.

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