

# UK Air Quality

## A commentary on the current (2017/2019) media and campaigning discussion

As the UK and the world's population, life expectancy and wealth have increased over the last 200 years or so, and quite dramatically over the last few decades throughout the world, so the recent clamour by some campaigning causes has grown ever more shrill.

Whilst most of the campaigning to continuously improve people's lives throughout the world was and is justified, sadly, in common with the current instant judgement "sound bite" approach to discussion of important matters, many campaigns now "*make a drama out of a crisis*" and they clearly put their moral judgement, ladled with liberal doses of self-righteous indignation, ahead of balanced facts and consequent reasonable action.

One such is the widespread campaigning regarding UK air quality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Without any doubt, and by any measure, the air quality in the UK is better now than it has been, at least since the industrial revolution (with it's consequent, ultimate, rise in living standards for the vast majority of people in the UK).

Before that time, *in the bucolic age imagined by today's dreamers*, of course the air quality was cleaner; but the vast majority of people died by their mid-thirties. So much for clean air!!!!

And although in certain respects, the recent rate of improvement in London has slowed during the current century, UK air quality still remains cleaner than ever, even in London; well at least since London has been larger than a small developing town.

Those with any knowledge of the actual measures and known historical facts know this to be the case.

The most extreme recent (post Second World War) example of dreadful and deadly air quality was the infamous coal burning smog's of the 1950's.

They rightly set the course for the year on year improvements, every year since.

These modern campaigns, by latching on to the recent COMEAP (2010) and Royal College of Surgeon's (2015) reports on the effects of particulates and Nitrogen Dioxide on human health, and their statistically calculated "*premature*" death rates (with extremely large range of uncertainties), combined with their recent successful legal actions against the government (thanks to EU imposed legal limits), have caused the "temperature" of the issue to be raised to "*crisis*" and thence "*drama*", and gradually public perception is moved to some vague new state, mostly one of Chicken Little panic!

The campaigning tone and supporting media obfuscation, such as "*the growing problem of air pollution*", is simply not supported **at any time or place** by the actual measurements from any location in the UK, including even London.

Everywhere in the UK air pollution is currently declining year on year, including every year this century.

*If*, according to the COMEAP/RCS statistical estimate, 40,000 people in the UK were dying "*prematurely*" due to air pollution in 2010, including 9,400 people in London, **it follows inevitably** that in the 50 years before 2010 (probably even 200 years), due to air pollution being worse year on year before 2010, the numbers dying "*prematurely*" due to air pollution were higher and higher. And yet life expectancy soared in those 50 (and 200) years, every year!

Since, after 2010, air quality has continued to improve every year, **it again follows inevitably** that the number of people calculated to be supposedly dying "*prematurely*" each year **must have fallen**, year on year, every year since!

**Note** also as referred to previously, the huge uncertainty about this statistical construct. This uncertainty yields confidence range limits from as low as just 1/6th of the estimate or 6,700, to as high as double the estimate, or 80,000, for the UK, and therefore from 1,600 to 19,000 for the London estimate!

In contrast to all such campaigns conceived on the zealous moral high ground, the prosaic actual facts, be they economic, financial, mathematical, chemical or physical, by all measures, show that we are healthier, wealthier and long lived than ever in human history.

No matter the naysayers and hand-ringers clamour that the sky is falling, that we are all dying (even *prematurely*), we still remain healthier, wealthier and long lived than we poor everyday folk have EVER been in the whole of human history.

And yet the wealthier and healthier we have become the more miserable, niggardly, gloomy and doom laden many have become; it seems not also wiser!

Perhaps those same doom merchants would do as well to live the lives of the majority of the world's population, or the lives of their parents or grand parents, to put modern life in the UK for most in real perspective.

This is no call for complacency or rampant, unbridled emissions of air pollutants. There remain many, many issues to tackle, including slack, lazy government and rich individual and corporate greed, plus every day ignorance and complacency.

Rather it is a call for reason, balance and fact based argument, before dubious hysterical, zealous and knee jerk judgement.

And above all a call for firm, continuing governmental support for the REAL sustained improvements that have been wrought, so far, in people's lives in the last 100 years.

Rather than the modern penchant to ban or subsidise everything in a panicked sop to a minority of vitriolic dreamers, government, entirely paid for by the taxpayer ("there is no such thing as public money – there is only taxpayers' money"), should honestly and forthrightly live up to the broad social contract; to keep the nation safe, prevent excess of greed and set and impose the legal limits to balance economy and environment for everyone's benefit, **but with a light touch**.