



As a big focus of the [Environment Act 2021](#), the longstanding fight for clean air is being strengthened by a raft of new targets and legislation. Alex Minett, Head of Product and Markets at CHAS, outlines what businesses need to be aware of.

There's little argument that good quality air is key to protecting our health. In 2020, a landmark ruling by a London coroner cited air pollution as a significant factor in the death of a nine-year-old girl with asthma, while the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) has provided evidence of links between air pollution exposure and multiple illnesses and diseases. Yet, it's not just our health driving the change for cleaner air. The impact on the environment and the push for energy independence play a part in the air quality agenda.

With work well underway to develop legally binding air quality targets, businesses and their supply chains must ensure they are informed and ready to adapt to stay compliant.

Air quality targets

Long considered the most harmful air pollutant, fine particulate matter (PM2.5) is the primary focus for air quality within the Environment Act framework, with two legally binding targets to be [set by October 2022](#), both heavily weighted towards reducing PM2.5 emissions.

The first target is a continuous reduction of PM2.5 that can be measured in ambient air annually, while the second is a long-term target (min 15 years) to stimulate public investment and focus on reducing population exposure to PM2.5 across the country.

There is currently no agreement on a safe level of PM2.5, but following consultation, a limit will likely be set and act as a standard for PM2.5 measurement.

Impact on and off-site

In early 2022, [DEFRA published updated statistics](#) on the primary sources of PM2.5 emissions for the UK in 2020 with manufacturing, industry and construction topping the table of culprits, taking the blame for 27%.

Businesses should start to prepare for increased scrutiny on any machinery that emits high levels of PM2.5 and other pollutants. Legislation is likely to look at proposals to drive the recall of products that fail to meet required environmental standards so ensure equipment is up to date with servicing and consider cleaner alternatives at an early stage where possible.

Action to lower emissions from all sources of air pollution can be seen across the UK, with enforcement powers handed to local governments and councils. This means at the tender and planning stages, businesses need to be aware of any local enforcement that may have specific air quality measuring in place, such as operating in an air quality management area (AQMA). London has declared AQMA's across all its boroughs, necessitating continuous air pollution monitoring on all major development sites with remedial action required if levels are deemed too high.

Businesses should also be attuned to whether they, or any of their supply chain, will be travelling through Clean Air Zones (CAZs). This includes being aware of the potential expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), which explicitly targets road traffic pollution with zone entry fees for the most polluting vehicles.

Via their latest, [Clean Air for All Londoners Report](#), The London Assembly Environment Committee has called for further powers to regulate Non-Road Mobile Machinery (NRMM) via a user-charging scheme with penalties for non-compliant plant and machinery. They are also looking to lobby the government for requirements on all developers of construction sites to conduct detailed air quality monitoring.

What can be done on-site?

Portable air pollution monitors are widely available and can benefit all sites that want or need to track their air quality.

There are also proactive steps sites can take to lessen the spread of dust and air pollution, such as:

- Controlling dust through fine water sprays used to dampen down the site
- Screening the whole site to stop dust spreading, or place fine mesh screening close to the dust source
- Covering skips and trucks loaded with construction materials and continually damp down with low levels of water
- Use non-toxic paints, solvents and other hazardous materials where possible
- No burning on site

Source: <https://sustainablebuild.co.uk/pollutionfromconstruction/>

It's also worth remembering existing obligations to protect your workforce from harm. Consider portable clean air systems that filter out particulates and other airborne pollutants, particularly in mobile cabins and welfare spaces. Ensure PPE is provided, where required, and that it is fitted correctly and in good working order.

Looking ahead to energy independence

The sharp rise in fuel costs and the impact of global events have shone an even brighter light on the drive to move away from costly, imported and polluting fossil fuels. The knock-on effect is a charged focus on renewable energy in an effort to achieve energy independence, with huge government investment in [renewable energy storage technologies](#). The harnessing of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, tidal and biomass can play a part in all stages of the construction process for electricity generation. While adopting the use of low emitting materials such as 'green concrete', eco-friendly insulation, reclaimed wood and recycled steel, can all significantly offset the long-term carbon footprint of a build.

Using low sulphur diesel in conjunction with the latest particulate filters and catalytic converters should be considered for all diesel-powered machinery used on a construction site. A step further would be to adopt hybrid technology with many big-name manufacturers leading innovation in equipment such as hybrid excavators, diggers and battery rechargeable lifts.

Conclusion

With consultations on how to achieve emissions reductions expected throughout 2022, businesses are encouraged to keep an ear to the ground and ensure they have their say on anything that might directly affect them.

There is little doubt that big polluters will see an increase in costs as air quality awareness accelerates. Taking a lead on air pollution can help future-proof your businesses and enhance your reputation.

Staying ahead of the curve is key to maintaining compliance but keeping up with fast-moving legislation can be a daunting prospect. Third-party accreditation can help. For example, meeting environmental management standards is just one of the areas monitored through CHAS's supply chain management service that clients can use free of charge to find contractors who take their environmental responsibilities seriously.

To find out more about how CHAS can help your business, call CHAS today on 0345 521 9111 or visit www.chas.co.uk

For more information about Clean Air Day, visit www.actionforcleanair.org.uk/campaigns/clean-air-day

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