

June 2026

Air pollution FAQ



Air pollution is a problem in Scotland

There are 26 Air Quality Management Areas in Scotland with pollution levels that are **damaging to human health**.¹

Am I at risk?

Yes. There is no safe level of air pollution. It is especially harmful to children, older people, pregnant women and people with pre-existing health conditions. Air pollution is often worse in inner-city areas, increasing inequalities in health.² You can also be exposed to air pollution indoors.³

Can it affect my health?

Yes. It can cause acute harm to our heart and lungs and chronic harm to almost every organ in the body.⁴ It is linked to pregnancy loss, premature birth, low birth weight and can affect lung development.⁵ Pollutants may lead to mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and psychoses and neurocognitive disorders like dementia.⁶

Can it be fatal?

Yes. It is considered the biggest environmental health risk across Europe.⁷ In the UK it is linked to 30,000 attributable deaths per year.⁸

Air pollution is linked to **1800 to 2700 premature deaths** a year in Scotland.⁹

What causes air pollution?

Traffic is the number one cause of air pollution in Scotland.¹⁰ Other sources include industrial facilities such as power plants, refineries, and factories, as well as agriculture and domestic wood burning.¹¹

Is my air pollution monitored?

Possibly. There is live air monitoring from 99 sites around Scotland.¹² The most harmful pollutants that are monitored are NO₂, SO₂, PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀.ⁱ

What is the Scottish Government doing?

Cleaner Air For Scotland 2 (CAFS 2) is Scotland's strategy to comply with EU¹³ and UK-wide air quality standards.¹⁴ This strategy has led to the introduction of Low Emission Zones in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow and a national PM_{2.5} monitoring framework.

Data shows that air quality has improved, with reductions in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀.¹⁵ But we need to do more to meet the standards set by the World Health Organisation and a current government review of CAFS 2 is working on this.¹⁶ We need action to accelerate a shift towards active travel and public transport, increase the efficiency of nitrogen use in agriculture and reduce pollution from domestic wood burning.¹⁷

We all have the right to

CLEAN AIR

Take action:

- [Clean Air Day](#)
- [Better Buses](#)
- [Communities against Woodsmoke](#)

More information: [Air Quality in Scotland](#) / [UK air quality tool](#) / [Air Quality Scotland Brochure](#) / [Engine idling](#)

ⁱ Particulate Matter 2.5 and 10 micrometres in size.

What can I do if I have a concern?

Contact our free legal advice service at www.ercs.scot/get-advice

All website data last accessed June 2026.

1. Scottish Air Quality (2026) [Air Quality Management Areas](#)
2. European Environment Agency (2023) [Urban adaptation in Europe: what works?](#)
3. Royal College of Physicians (2025) [A breath of fresh air: responding to the health challenges of modern air pollution](#)
4. European Environment Agency (2026) [How air pollution affects our health](#)
5. World Health Organisation (2026) [Health impacts](#)
6. European Environment Agency (2026) [Impacts of air pollution on mental health](#)
7. European Environment Agency (2026) [What impact does air pollution have on my health?](#)
8. Royal College of Physicians (2025) [A breath of fresh air: responding to the health challenges of modern air pollution](#)
9. UK Health Security Agency (2022) [Chemical Hazards and Poisons Report, p19](#)
10. Scottish Government (2020) [Cleaner Air for Scotland 2: environmental report](#)
11. Ricardo (2025) [Scottish Air Quality Database Annual Report](#)
12. Scotland's environment (2026) [Air Quality in Scotland](#)
13. European Union (2024) [Ambient air quality and clean air for Europe Directive \(EU\) 2024/2881](#)
14. Scottish Government (2016) [Part IV of The Environment Act 1995](#)
15. Scottish Government (2024) [CAFS2 Progress Report](#)
16. Ibid.
17. Ricardo (2025) [Scottish Air Quality Database Annual Report](#)

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