

Ozone boosts largely in Spain

Ecologistas en Acción starts an informative and reporting campaign about tropospheric ozone pollution in Madrid, Catalunya and the south-east of the Peninsula

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The heat wave being suffered since the beginning of the month in the centre and south of Spain, the heavy motorized traffic occurring in the main cities and roads and the raise in electricity consumption -produced in thermal power plants- due to the use of air conditioning have, altogether, caused a boost in the tropospheric ozone levels largely all over the country. In the case of Catalunya, still must be added the raise in maritime transit and the waste incineration policies.

Since Wednesday the 1st of June, the legal target for health protection regarding ozone levels have been systematically exceeded in the interior of Andalusia, Murcia, València and Catalunya, and these objectives have also been frequently exceeded in Castilla La Mancha, Madrid and all along Ebro river valley, starting in the Basque Country and as it passes by Navarra, Aragón towards Tarragona.

The regulation has established, to protect human health, an ozone target level in the air of less than $120\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ -averaged along 8 hours period- which should not be exceeded more than 25 days per year. Since spring began, this number has already been exceeded in some of the stations beyond the Mediterranean coastline, such as those in Caravaca and Lorca, in the Region of Murcia.

Tropospheric ozone is the most present air pollutant in Spain, and the one that most affects population and vegetation, with an increasing trend. This is caused by the raising average temperatures and the extreme weather conditions (heat waves) during summer, which are a result of the climate change.

As shown last Tuesday by Ecologistas en Acción during the presentation of their Air Quality in Spain 2015 report, during last year, ozone affected 39 million people in the country and two thirds of the territory, increasing in comparison with 2014. At the end of the current spring, ozone levels have boosted, suggesting a complicated summer because of the forecasted average temperature rise in the Peninsula and the Balearic Islands.

For these reasons, Ecologistas en Acción has started an informative, awareness and reporting campaign regarding ozone air pollution, focused on the Comunidad de Madrid and surrounding areas of Castilla, Catalunya and the southeast of the peninsula (Almería and Murcia). This campaign will inform the population about the issue, suggesting self-protection actions to limit the exposition to this pollutant, while denouncing the passivity of health and environmental authorities. In Catalunya, a Citizen Ozone Measurement Campaign will be launched in one of the areas more affected by this pollutant, in the context of the European research project CAPTOR held by Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), Guifi.net and Ecologistas en Acción. This campaign will later be replicated in Italy and Austria.

Tropospheric ozone, also known as "bad" ozone in comparison to the "good" ozone in the stratosphere, is a polluting byproduct generated by the reaction of nitrogen dioxide and hydrocarbons emitted by cars and some industries under heavy sunlight conditions. When inhaled, it increases the risk of acute breathing diseases and reduces lung function, as well as it worsens cardiovascular diseases. The WHO estimates 1800 yearly premature deaths in Spain caused by the exposition to ozone levels such as those registered this June. Ozone is not only toxic for humans, but also for vegetation, as it damages forests and reduces the productivity of crops.

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