



air quality in
Neath
Port Talbot

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Improving the quality of our air in Neath Port Talbot



Clean air is essential to our health and that of the environment. But over the last 100 years, rising industrial and energy production, the burning of fossil fuels, and the dramatic rise in traffic on our roads have all contributed to poor air quality in towns and cities across the world – and Neath Port Talbot is no exception.

Much progress has been made in recent years across the county borough and we have achieved significant reductions in harmful emissions. However, there is clearly more that can be done to tackle the issue and we are committed to doing all we can to ensure people's right to clean air.

Here in Neath Port Talbot, we are keen to address this and further improve the quality of the air that we breathe.

To this end, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council has joined forces with the Environment Agency, Welsh Assembly Government, the Local Health Board and Public Health Wales to launch an Air Quality Project, which will set out a plan to improve air quality across the county borough.

What do we hope to achieve through this project?

The Neath Port Talbot Air Quality Project has been established to:

- better define areas of poor air quality and what we need to do to further improve them
- get a better understanding of how poor air quality can affect people's health
- work with local communities to tackle air quality issues and inform them better on improvements
- improve the support to the most vulnerable residents affected by poor air quality

Trends in air quality

Air quality varies significantly, depending upon location and time of year. For example, industrial areas and those with lots of traffic are likely to have a poorer quality air than rural areas.

We are keen to make sure that the air quality across the county will meet all necessary standards.



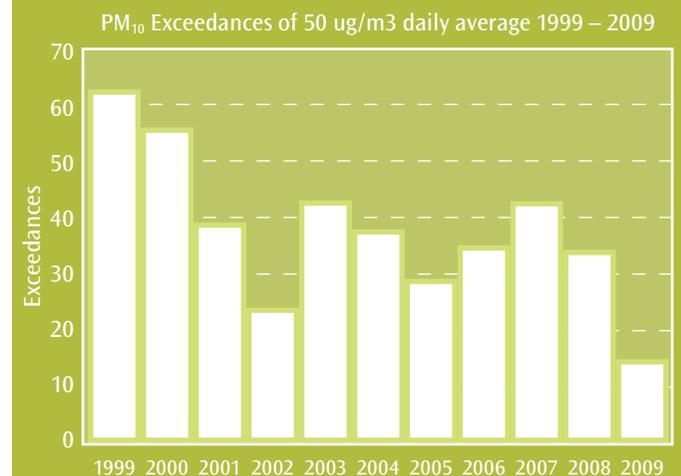
In Neath Port Talbot, we have teams of dedicated officers who regulate air pollution from industry and transport, particularly where air quality is known or suspected to be poor, to ensure emissions are within safe limits.

Air quality is measured across the county borough using specialist monitoring equipment designed to measure air pollutants such as fine particulates, nitrogen dioxide and heavy metals e.g. nickel, which can have a harmful effect both on our health and the environment. There are more than 50 such stations across Neath Port Talbot, from Onllwyn to East Pit, Margam, and from the coast to the heads of the valleys.

Indeed, in Port Talbot itself, air quality has improved significantly over the past 10 years.

However, as traffic volumes increase, it is inevitable that air quality will reduce around some of the more congested roads.

We are keen to make sure that the air quality across the county will meet all necessary standards and as regulators, we will work together with government, industry, local communities and others to ensure that these standards are met.





We're making progress

Over the last few years, a number of innovative measures have been introduced to help improve air quality in Neath Port Talbot.

They include the introduction of new ways of working with industry to implement changes to their processes to reduce emissions. They also include using new technology to more accurately identify and act on the exact causes of pollution.

Although some areas of Port Talbot are known to have poor air quality at times, it is certainly not as bad as you might think. In relation to fine particulate dust, or PM₁₀, the air quality around Port Talbot has improved significantly in recent years and has now reached the best quality ever recorded in the town.

Back in 1999, approximately 62 exceedances of the short-term limit set by government were recorded in Port Talbot. As the maximum allowed is 35 exceedances per year, it was clear that the problem had to be addressed. Since then, steady improvements have been made. In 2008 the number of exceedances had dropped to 34, and in 2009 results were even better. This

follows significant investment and commitment by the steelworks to control and reduce their impact on the local environment. Further investment will be needed to meet increasingly stringent new standards of air quality required by government.

Investment in better detection equipment has also resulted in identifying areas with poor air quality which is due to traffic, and where public health could be adversely affected.

Better traffic management is helping to improve air quality and protect public health. For example, since the 1st February this year, the southbound road from Blanco's in Port Talbot to the roundabout at Afan Way has been closed to traffic except for buses. Instead, motorists will use the Peripheral Distributor Road. Northbound traffic is unaffected.

We are also working in partnership with other agencies and local businesses to bring about investment in new equipment and by reviewing the use of existing equipment we are now able to gain a much better understanding of air quality.

Health matters

It is well documented that air pollution can have a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing, and that certain groups of people may be affected more than others.

Generally, the groups of people thought to be most susceptible to the effects of poor air quality are the young, elderly and those who already suffer from existing respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses.

The main pollutants of concern in Neath Port Talbot are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), and fine particulate matter (PM₁₀).

NO₂ emissions mainly occur as a consequence of the burning of fossil fuels. When exposed to high levels, health effects include respiratory irritation and shortness of breath.

Fine particulates are tiny airborne particles that come from many different sources including vehicles, industry and mining.

The health impacts depend on the size and type of the particles. PM₁₀ (Particles with a diameter of less than 10 microns) is inhalable and therefore can get past your nose and throat defences and potentially lodge deep in the lungs, causing or exacerbating respiratory diseases.

Other air pollutants monitored in Neath Port Talbot include sulphur dioxide (SO₂), ozone (O₃), volatile organic compounds (VOC) and heavy metals. Some of these pollutants adversely affect health.

We are determined to ensure the cleanest possible air in Neath Port Talbot and the measures that have been put in place to improve our air quality can only help to reduce any related risk to our health.

So, who is responsible for improving our air quality in Neath Port Talbot?



The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has overall responsibility for meeting government and European air quality objectives and works with Local Authorities across Wales and Environment Agency Wales (EAW) to ensure these objectives are met.



Asiantaeth yr
Amgylchedd Cymru
Environment
Agency Wales

EAW and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPT) are both regulators and determine whether permits should be issued to business and industry within the County Borough where emissions might occur. We inspect and audit these companies to ensure permit conditions are adhered to. Some operators may be required to monitor and report on their emissions. The larger operations and processes are normally regulated by EAW.



Public Health Wales and the Health Protection Agency work together to support the Local Health Board to protect and improve the local population's health and wellbeing. In turn, these agencies work in conjunction with WAG, EAW and NPT on air quality and give expert advice on public health related issues.

For further information on air quality in Neath Port Talbot, please contact the Council's Climate Change Team on (01639) 686845 or go to www.npt.gov.uk/airquality

To find out more about the Environment Agency Wales or about your environment:

- Call 08708 506506 (Mon-Fri 8-6)
- Email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
- Or visit our website www.environment-agency.wales.gov.uk
- Incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 (24hrs)