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European
Environmental
Policy **UK**

Air Quality in the UK: State of Play

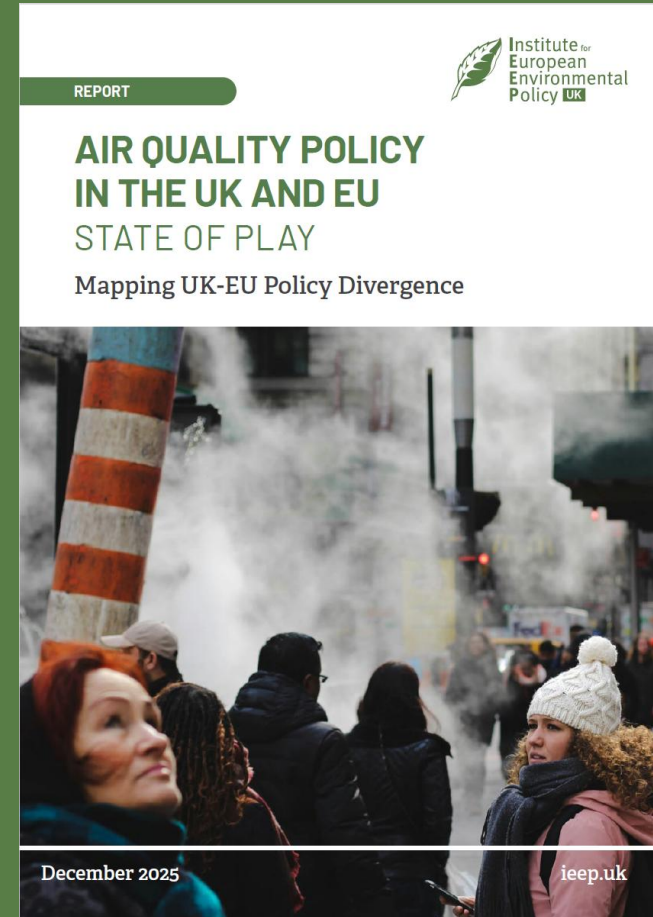
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IEEP UK Air Quality: State of Play Report (2025)

- Progress has been made in UK and EU in recent decades
- UK has diverged from EU in some areas
- EU Ambient Air Quality Directive 2024
- Vs. UK Air Quality Standards Regulations 2010 + more piecemeal updates in other legislation



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UK-EU Divergence in AQ Legislation on Limit Values

Table 2 Comparison of Limit Values of WHO Air Quality Guidelines, EU AAQD Targets, UK Air Quality Standards Regulations, and Devolved Nation Divergence

Pollutants	Limit value				
	WHO air quality guidelines (2021) ¹⁶	New EU Ambient Air Quality Directive		UK Air Quality Standards Regulations 2010 ^{17,18}	Current Devolved Targets (where different to AQSR 2010)
		Dec 2026 (carried over from former directives)	Jan 2030		
PM _{2.5} (24-hour)	15 µg/m ³	-	25 µg/m ³ (18/year)	-	-
PM _{2.5} (annual)	5 µg/m ³	25 µg/m ³	10 µg/m ³	20 µg/m ³ (2020); 15% reduction in urban areas 2010-2020	10 µg/m ³ in Scotland; 10 µg/m ³ in England and Wales by 2040 ^{19,20} (Environmental Targets (Fine Particulate Matter) Regulations 2023)
PM ₁₀ (24-hour)	45 µg/m ³	50 µg/m ³ (35/year)	45 µg/m ³ (18/year)	50 µg/m ³ (2004; 2010 in Scotland) (35/year; 7/year in Scotland)	-
PM ₁₀ (annual)	15 µg/m ³	40 µg/m ³	20 µg/m ³	40 µg/m ³ (2004);	18 µg/m ³ in Scotland
NO ₂ (1 hour)	200 µg/m ³	200 µg/m ³ (18/year)	200 µg/m ³ (3/year)	200 µg/m ³ (2005) (18/year)	-
NO ₂ (24-hour)	25 µg/m ³	-	50 µg/m ³ (18/year)	-	-
NO ₂ (annual)	10 µg/m ³	40 µg/m ³	20 µg/m ³	40 µg/m ³ (2005)	-

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		Dec 2026 (carried over from former directives)	Jan 2030		
SO ₂ (10-minute)	500 µg/m ³	-	-	266 µg/m ³ (15-minute)(2005) (35/year)	-
SO ₂ (1 hour)	-	350 µg/m ³ (24/year)	350 µg/m ³ (3/year)	350 µg/m ³ (2004) (24/year)	-
SO ₂ (24-hour)	40 µg/m ³	125 µg/m ³ (3/year)	50 µg/m ³ (18/year)	125 µg/m ³ (2004) (3/year)	-
SO ₂ (annual)	-	-	20 µg/m ³	-	-
Benzene (annual)	-	5 µg/m ³	3.4 µg/m ³	5 µg/m ³ in England/Wales (2010); 3.25 µg/m ³ in Scotland/NI (2010)	-
CO (15-minute)	100 mg/m ³	-	-	-	-
CO (1 hour)	35 mg/m ³	-	-	-	-
CO (daily 8-hour mean)	10 mg/m ³	10 mg/m ³	10 mg/m ³	10 mg/m ³ (2023)	-
CO (24-hour)	4 mg/m ³	-	4 mg/m ³ (18/year)	-	-
O ₃ (peak season)	60 µg/m ³	-	-	-	-
O ₃ (daily 8-hour mean)	100 µg/m ³	120 µg/m ³ (18/year)	100 µg/m ³ (3/year, Jan 2050)	100 µg/m ³ (2005) (10/year)	-

Why WHO Standards?

Useful international yardstick, but also limitations:

1. Limited number of key pollutants
2. Focus on human health, not ecosystems/environment
3. Only ambient AQ
4. WHO targets are a stepping stone...

Let's Be Positive, Pragmatic and Proactive!

- Practical challenges
- Public attitudes and political will
- Peer benchmarks and lessons
- Opportunities for alignment and cooperation



Thank You

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