

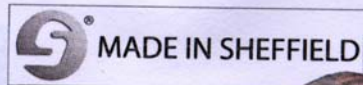
SHEFFIELD TELEGRAPH

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Sheffield urged to clean up its act and save lives

SHEFFIELD was urged this week to step up its efforts to tackle air pollution for the sake of residents' health and the local economy.

The latest report on the State of Sheffield is underlining the toll of fumes generated largely by traffic and industry, with an estimated 500 premature deaths a year in the city and £160m a year lost in working days.

Like many cities, Sheffield is failing to meet UK and European guidelines on air quality, and while conditions are gener-

By PETER KAY

ally improving, some parts of the city are seeing a worsening of air pollution.

Already the council is revising an action plan to address many of the issues, but environmental health campaigners are calling for greater urgency.

Neil Parry, of the NHS-financed East End Quality of Life Initiative in Sheffield, said: "The main thing is to get over to the public that it affects people's health, and it has a big impact."

Traffic fumes were a threat to not just people living near the motorway, but those in the city centre and near arterial routes such as Ecclesall Road, Chesterfield Road and Abbeydale Road, he said.

"There needs to be more public awareness. It is a serious public health crisis, and we have been saying this for a long time."

Earlier this month residents in the Millhouses area said a tram link was needed to the south west of the city to ease pressure on traffic-clogged roads that were spew-

ing fumes, and community representatives in Broomhill have expressed their concerns over the impact of the heavy traffic that passes through the suburb.

The State of Sheffield 2013 report indicates that the city has made progress on many issues in recent times, despite the tough economic conditions.

But air quality emerges as one of the key problems that has to be addressed.

"Sheffield reflects the national picture, in that air quality is generally improving," says the report. "However, in many

areas, near the motorway and within the busy urban centre, it has not improved, with some places seeing air quality worsening. Reflecting national trends and the conditions in many other major cities in the UK, Sheffield currently breaches UK and European thresholds for air quality."

Air pollution has short and long-term implications for health, especially for people with respiratory and cardiovascular problems, with the young and old at most risk. Those with heart and lung

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City faces air pollution challenge

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conditions can expect to die up to nine years earlier. "Overall the adverse effects of pollutions are such that it has a bigger effect on life expectancy than road traffic accidents and passive smoking."

The council, which has been working on strategies for years, admits it is a "really stubborn" issue.

Although traffic levels are broadly

the same as ten years ago, use of buses declined up to 2011, and more cars are now entering the city centre. The council says numbers of bus passengers are now starting to pick up as a result of an agreement involving the operators, and a main plank of its anti-pollution policy is to encourage people to turn to public transport, walking and cycling instead of taking the car.

It is looking at declaring a Low

Emission Zone for buses and other vehicles, and generally wants to promote initiatives such as electric cars to help cut nitrogen dioxide and particulate concentrations.

Mr Parry said there had been a lack of willingness so far at government level to make a real difference, but added: "We really need the city council to champion this. It should be ingrained in all their work."

At the same time, a shift in public

attitude was needed, with people being more aware of the consequences of actions such as driving children a short distance to their school.

Yet cultural change could be achieved. "Nobody took a lot of notice about what was happening with smoking for quite a few years, even though it was known to affect your health. But we need to get a move on."

● State of Sheffield, page 3.