



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

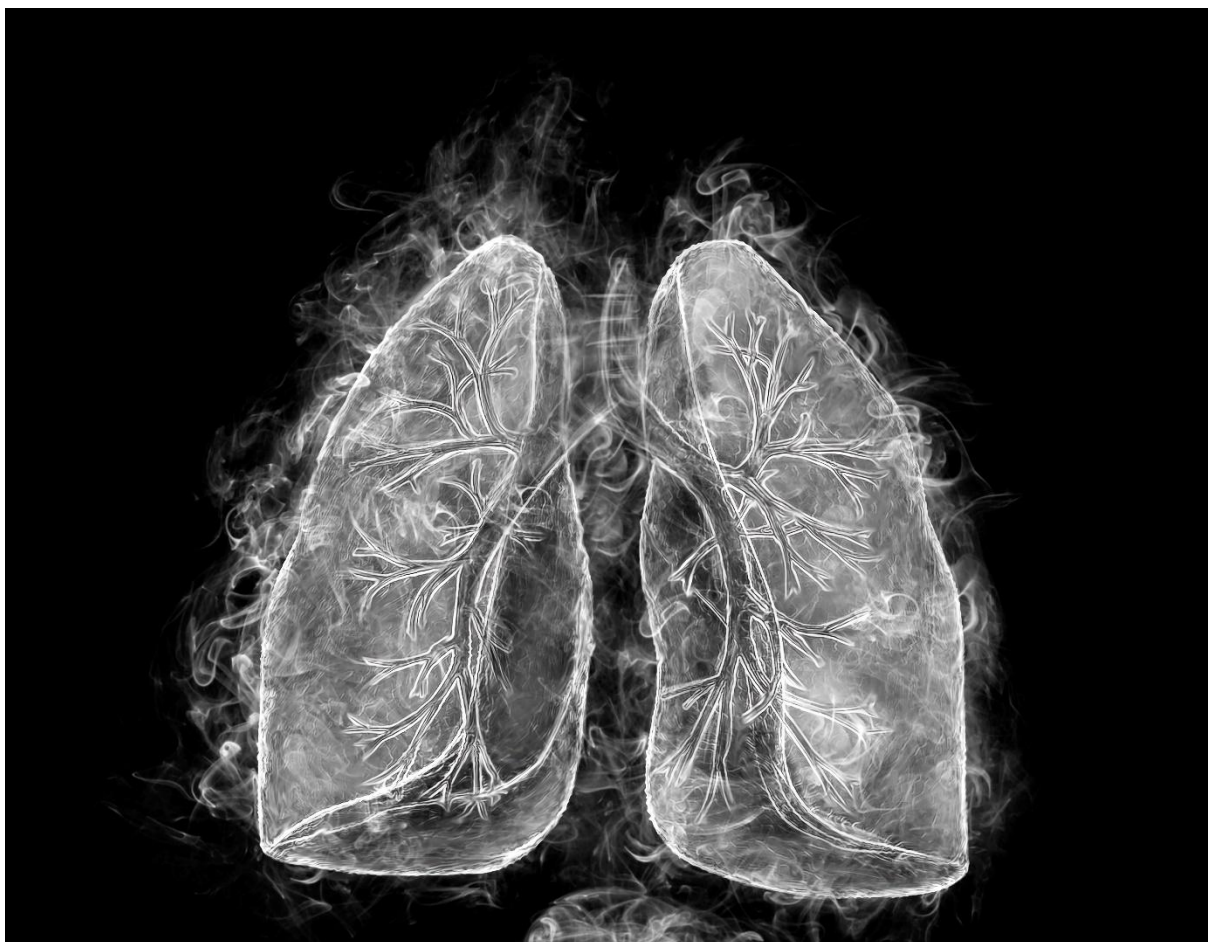
An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

# **Consultation on the Draft Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 to tighten annual average particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>) limits, targets and objectives in Northern Ireland**



## Alternative Formats

This document is also available on the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-draft-air-quality-amendment-regulations-northern-ireland-2026>

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**Tel:** 028 9056 9835 and talk to one of the Consultation Team.

If you have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via Text Relay. Dial 18001 028 9056 9835

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# Executive Summary

## Purpose and context

This consultation sets out proposed legislative amendments to strengthen air quality standards for particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>) in Northern Ireland. The aim is to reduce harmful air pollution, protect public health, and align more closely with international (WHO) guidance and emerging standards across the UK and Ireland.

## Rationale for change

Particulate matter is recognised as one of the most significant air pollutants affecting health in Northern Ireland. Fine particles (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) are linked to respiratory and cardiovascular disease, cancer, and premature mortality. There is no safe level of exposure, and approximately 936 deaths annually in Northern Ireland are attributed to PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Although emissions have declined since 2005 due to cleaner technologies and reduced solid fuel use, domestic combustion and transport remain key sources. Current legal limits are based on older EU-derived standards and are less stringent than modern WHO guidance.

## Existing legislative framework

Ambient air quality in Northern Ireland is currently governed by:

- Air Quality Standards Regulations (NI) 2010 (limit and target values)
- Air Quality Regulations (NI) 2003 (objectives and competent authority duties)

## Key proposals

The draft Regulations propose tighter annual average standards:

- **PM<sub>10</sub>**
  - Limit value: reduced from 40 → 20 µg/m<sup>3</sup>
  - Objective: reduced from 40 → 20 µg/m<sup>3</sup>
- **PM<sub>2.5</sub>**
  - Limit value: reduced from 25 → 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup>
  - Target value: reduced from 25 → 8 µg/m<sup>3</sup>

These changes would align Northern Ireland with **WHO Interim Target 4**, representing a significant step towards the long-term WHO Air Quality Guideline.

Additional administrative updates include:

- Updating names of competent authorities
- Revoking outdated 2003 amendment regulations
- Clarifying monitoring and assessment provisions

## Deliverability and evidence

Analysis of monitoring data (2019–2024) indicates that:

- Most monitoring sites already comply with the proposed new standards
- Any exceedances are marginal
- Full compliance has been achieved in recent years (2023–2024) across all monitored sites

This suggests the proposed limits are achievable in the near term.

### **Policy alignment and strategic fit**

The proposals would:

- Align Northern Ireland more closely with tightening standards in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland
- Support cross border consistency and address transboundary air pollution
- Respond to stakeholder support for WHO-aligned legally binding targets
- Support the NI Environmental Improvement Plan, draft Clean Air Strategy and draft Climate Action Plan

### **Implementation and compliance**

The proposed compliance date is set for 1 January 2028. Compliance will be monitored through existing statutory reporting mechanisms and district council review processes, ensuring alignment with established governance frameworks. Annual air quality reports will continue to play a key role in tracking compliance over time and will provide an evidence base to inform ongoing policy development.

### **Impacts**

Impact and screening assessments indicate:

- No significant equality, child rights, rural, or regulatory impacts requiring full assessment
- No disproportionate impact on rural communities

### **Consultation process**

A 12-week public consultation will be conducted, during which stakeholders will be invited to provide feedback on the proposed limits, targets, and implementation timeline. The responses received through this process will be used to inform final policy decisions and guide the drafting of legislation before the regulations are formally laid before the Assembly.

### **Overall conclusion**

The draft Regulations represent a tightening of air quality standards for particulate matter in Northern Ireland. They are evidence-based, achievable and aligned with international health guidance and regional policy trends. Adoption would mark an important step towards reducing air pollution-related health impacts and progressing towards long-term WHO guideline levels.

# Impact Assessments

## ***Equality & Disability***

This policy has been screened in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998<sup>(1)</sup>, which requires public authorities to consider how their decisions might affect equality of opportunity and good relations for people of different ages, religions, political opinions, racial groups, genders, sexual orientations, marital or dependency status, and those with or without disabilities. The screening helps identify any potential impacts early in the process and ensures that equality is built into the development of the policy. The screening outcome and full screening form are available on the consultation website: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-draft-air-quality-amendment-regulations-northern-ireland-2026>. A full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is not considered necessary at this stage.

## ***Rural Needs***

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) has also been completed in line with the guidance on the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016<sup>(2)</sup>. This Act requires public authorities to give due regard to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services.

## ***Child Rights***

A Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) Screening has been completed for these Regulations to consider their effect on children and young people including their wellbeing, rights and access to opportunities. It has been determined that a full impact assessment will not be required.

## ***Regulatory***

A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) screening was completed by the Department. It was determined that it is unlikely that there will be any mandatory costs, savings or administrative burdens placed on NI businesses or the voluntary/community sector due to the implementation of these Regulations. For these reasons, a full RIA has been screened out.

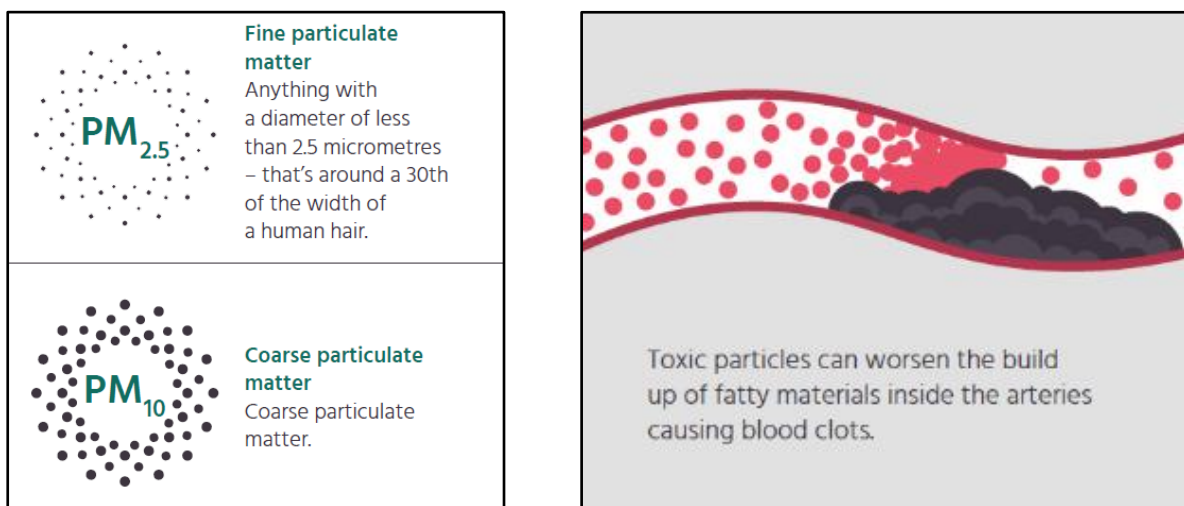
# Introduction

## Particulate matter and health impacts

According to the Air Quality Expert Group (AQEG), Particulate matter (PM) is the term used to describe condensed phase (solid or liquid) particles suspended in the atmosphere<sup>(3)</sup>. It comprises primary components (directly emitted) and secondary components (formed in the atmosphere). PM derives from both anthropogenic (such as fuel combustion and transport) and natural sources (such as sea spray and Saharan dust).

PM<sub>10</sub> are particles with a diameter less than 10 µg and PM<sub>2.5</sub> are fine particles less than 2.5 µg.

**Figure 1: Illustration of particulate matter size** <sup>(4)</sup>

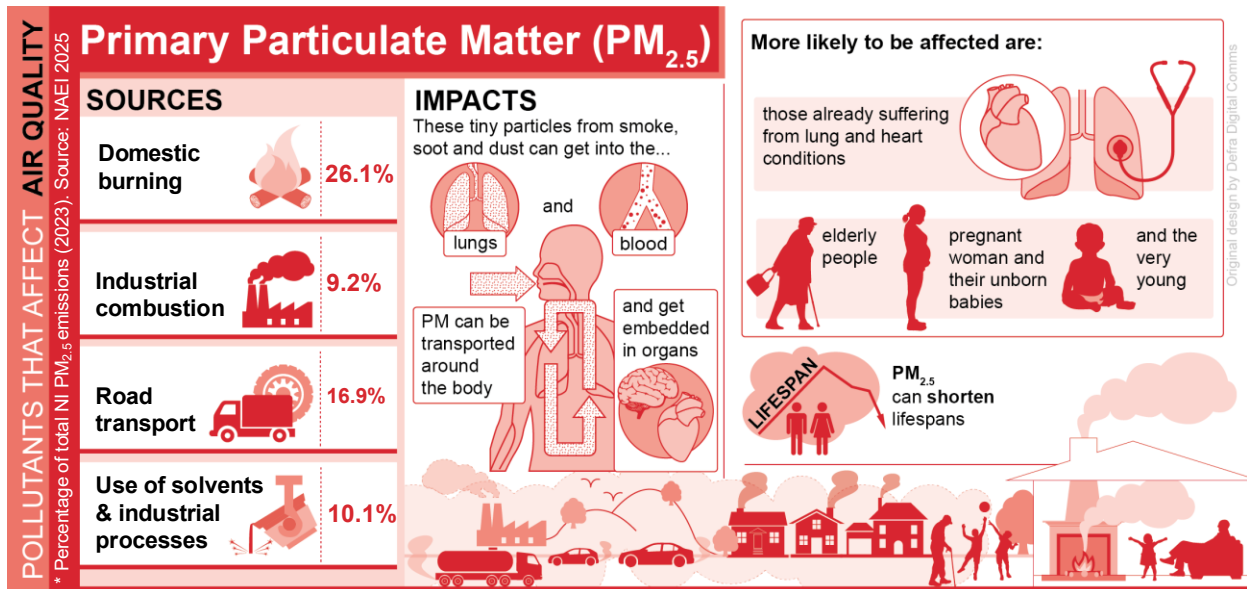


The potential impact on human health of PM is well established. PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> can act directly as a respiratory irritant in the airways, and for PM<sub>2.5</sub> in particular, because of the small size of these particles, they may cross from the lungs into the bloodstream, where they can have more indirect systemic effects, such as increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has also classified ambient outdoor pollution, including PM<sub>2.5</sub> as a Group 1 human carcinogen<sup>(5)</sup>. The carcinogenic potential extends beyond respiratory implications, affecting various organs, including the digestive tract, breast, and prostate. Long-term exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub> is associated with increased cancer mortality, with specific risks identified for different cancer types<sup>(6)</sup>. **There is no safe level of PM.**

In a report from the British and Irish Heart Foundation Northern Ireland released in 2023, Air Pollution and Mortality on the Island of Ireland, reports that 936 deaths in Northern Ireland annually were attributed to fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) air

pollution, with 314 of these deaths being attributed to circulatory diseases <sup>(7)</sup>. Based on these figures more must be done to save lives through improving our air quality.

**Figure 2: Percentages of Particulate Matter (PM) emissions in Northern Ireland from different sources 2023 (Source: NAEI 2025)**

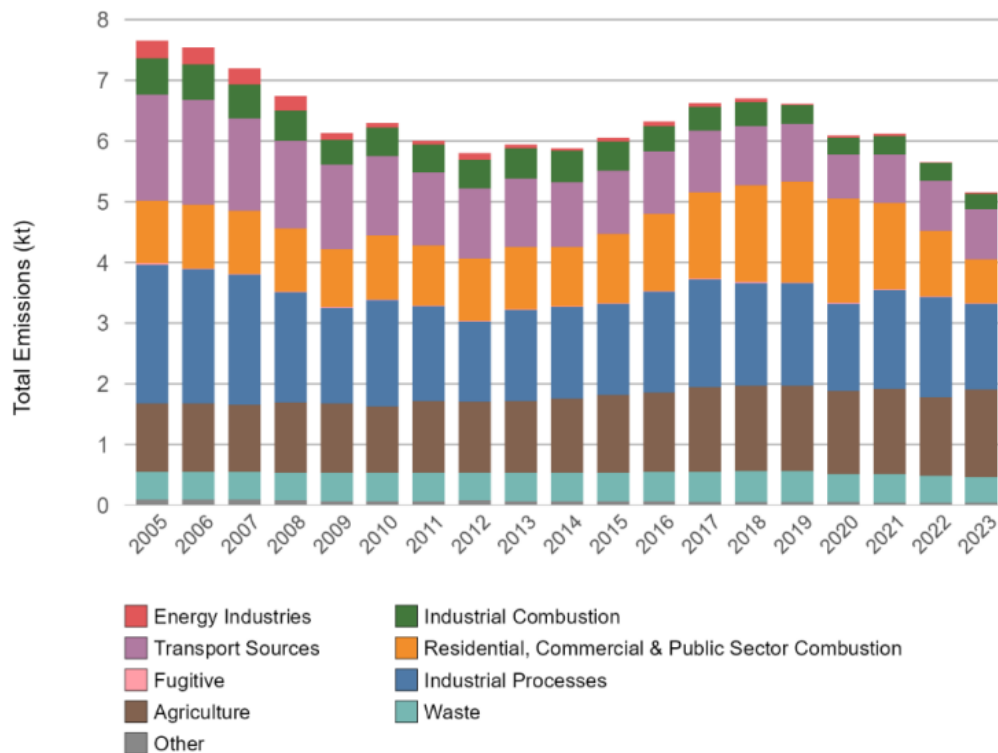


### Modelled emissions of PM in Northern Ireland

**PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions:** The transport fleet has gradually decreased due to more stringent exhaust emissions standards over time. The phasing out of coal and the better technologies and stricter regulation for industrial combustion and energy production also decreased PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions. In recent years, the increased uptake of electric vehicles has helped to reduce tailpipe PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions.

Between 2022 and 2023, PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions fell by 15%, largely driven by a 35% reduction in emissions from domestic stationary combustion, reflecting lower solid fuel use in homes. While PM<sub>2.5</sub> has many sources, combustion, particularly domestic burning remains more significant than industrial processes <sup>(8)</sup>.

**Figure 3: PM<sub>2.5</sub> Emissions in Northern Ireland 2005-2023 (published September 2025) <sup>(8)</sup>**

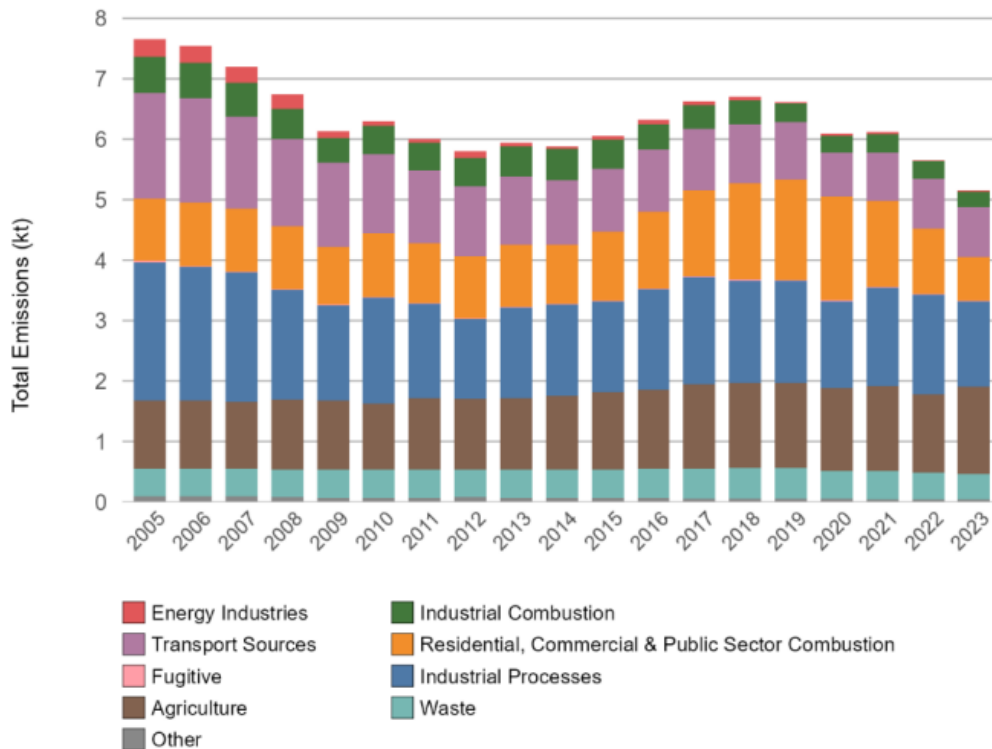


**PM<sub>10</sub> emissions:** While industrial processes were historically the largest source of PM<sub>10</sub>, agriculture was the main contributor in 2023. Agriculture produces 97% of current ammonia emissions. Ammonia can persist for a long time in the atmosphere and be transported for long distances. It can react with other air pollutants like nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide to form ammonium aerosols, which are precursors for particulate matter, such as PM<sub>10</sub> (and also PM<sub>2.5</sub>) <sup>(9)</sup>.

The overall decrease in PM<sub>10</sub> emissions from 2005 is primarily driven by a reduction in emissions from vehicles due to the successive introduction of tighter emission standards over time, while non-exhaust PM<sub>10</sub> emissions from vehicles have been increasing due to increasing traffic activity. It should be noted that the decrease in emissions in 2020 is likely due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in reduced traffic volumes.

In recent years, emissions from residential, commercial & public sector combustion have primarily increased, driven by increased wood fuel use in the residential sector. These two trends offset one another meaning that there have been fluctuations in the trend of PM<sub>10</sub> emissions across the time series.

**Figure 4: PM<sub>10</sub> Emissions in Northern Ireland 2005-2023 (published September 2025) <sup>(8)</sup>**



### Current legislation in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland ambient levels of PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> are regulated by the Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 <sup>(10)</sup>, as amended. These Regulations transpose Directive 2008/50/EC on Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe <sup>(11)</sup> and are now part of retained EU legislation. The 2010 Regulations set out limit values and target values for ambient concentrations for a range of pollutants, including PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

- **Schedule 2 of the Regulations prescribes an annual average limit value of 40 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for PM<sub>10</sub> and 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for PM<sub>2.5</sub>.**
- **Schedule 3 of the Regulations further prescribes an annual average target value of 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for PM<sub>2.5</sub>.**

Northern Ireland departments have a duty to ensure that levels of pollutants do not exceed the limit values set out in Schedule 2. They must also ensure that all necessary measures not entailing disproportionate costs are taken to ensure that concentrations of pollutants do not exceed the target values in Schedule 3. Currently the limit and target value for PM<sub>2.5</sub> in legislation are the same, which is currently ineffective and therefore a tighter target value is being proposed. There is no target value in the Regulations for PM<sub>10</sub>.

Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 <sup>(12)</sup> requires district councils to review the quality of air within their area. This review requires an assessment to be made as to whether air quality standards and objectives from the Regulations are being

achieved, or likely to be achieved. The objectives are prescribed by The Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 <sup>(13)</sup> at Regulation 3 and in the Schedule respectively.

- **The Schedule of the Regulations prescribes an annual average objective of 40 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for PM<sub>10</sub>. There is no objective set for PM<sub>2.5</sub>.**

### **World Health Organisation (WHO) global air quality guidelines**

The WHO global air quality guidelines - Particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide <sup>(14)</sup>, which was published on 22nd September 2021, sets recommended targets for air quality.

Exceedance of the air quality guideline (AQG) levels is associated with risks to public health. These guidelines are not legally binding standards. However, they do provide WHO Member States with an evidence-informed tool that can be used to inform legislation and policy. Ultimately, the goal of these guidelines is to provide guidance to help reduce levels of air pollutants in order to decrease the health burden resulting from exposure to air pollution worldwide.

In the 2021 guideline update, recommendations on AQG levels are formulated, together with interim targets for pollutants including PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>. The WHO has not specified dates or timelines as to when these interim targets should be met but has indicated that they should be used as a guide for reduction efforts towards the ultimate and timely achievement of the AQG levels.

The WHO global air quality interim targets are graduated from 1 to 4 with ‘1’ being a challenging but attainable target, and ‘4’ being a much higher standard. The ultimate target is the AQG level, which is a highly ambitious, aspirational target.

**Table 1: WHO Air Quality Guideline (AQG) levels and Interim Targets for Particulate Matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>)**

Pollutant	Averaging time	Interim target				AQG
		1	2	3	4	
PM <sub>10</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup>	Annual	70	50	30	20	15
PM <sub>2.5</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup>	Annual	35	25	15	10	5

There was very strong support voiced for legally binding limits based on the WHO 2021 guidelines for particulate matter in the responses to the Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland public Discussion Document <sup>(15)</sup> (CASDD) along with a recognition of the ‘no safe level’ approach to air pollution. Key health stakeholders are also calling for implementation of these limits.

## Proposals

### New annual average limit value, target value and objectives for PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>

As PM is considered to be the pollutant with the biggest risk to health in Northern Ireland, DAERA is seeking to lay the Regulations at Annex A which will amend the annual average limit values, target values and objectives for PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> in the 2010 and 2003 Regulations as set out in Table 2:

**Table 2: Comparison of current and proposed new annual average PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> limits, objectives and targets**

Pollutant	Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010				Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003	
	Annual average limit value (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )		Annual average target value (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )		Annual average objective value (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	
	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed
PM <sub>10</sub>	40	20	N/A	N/A	40	20
PM <sub>2.5</sub>	25	10	25	8	N/A	N/A

These proposed new standards would align Northern Ireland with **interim target 4** of the WHO guideline levels and would put us on a path to achieve the AQG levels in the future. In order to ensure Competent Authorities are required to meet the air quality objectives within the 2003 regulations on an ongoing basis the definition of “Relevant Period” has been amended. Annual average objectives will need to be achieved each calendar year with the first year being 1 January 2027 to 31 December 2027. To ensure consistency and provide a lead in time, all of the new annual average limits, targets and objectives will have an intended compliance date of 1 January 2028.

It is recognised that further policy interventions are needed before even stricter standards are brought in. Implementing these proposed standards are seen as a first step and would also put Northern Ireland more in line with the rest of the UK and Ireland who have adopted or are considering tighter restrictions for PM as outlined in page 14.

In addition to amending standards for PM, a number of other amendments are included in the Regulations as a means to tidy up the statute book:

- The names for the competent authorities in the 2003 Regulations will be amended to reflect their current names.

- The Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 will be revoked.
- A new Schedule has been added clarifying monitoring and assessment provisions currently contained within Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe.

### Compliance with historical monitoring data

Analysis of air quality monitoring site data <sup>(16)</sup> shows that Northern Ireland has been compliant with the proposed new limits, targets and objectives for PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> at most sites since 2019. This is clear evidence that Northern Ireland can meet and maintain these standards going forward.

**Table 3: Number of NI PM<sub>2.5</sub> monitoring sites meeting the proposed new limit and target values based on 2019-2024 air quality data annual average data**

Year	Proposed new annual average limit value (10 ug/m <sup>3</sup> )	Proposed new annual average target value (8 ug/m <sup>3</sup> )
<b>2019 (3 sites total)</b>	2	1
<b>2020 (3 sites total)</b>	3	3
<b>2021 (5 sites total)</b>	5	5
<b>2022 (8 sites total)</b>	7	5
<b>2023 (9 sites total)</b>	9	9
<b>2024 (10 sites total)</b>	10	10

For the few instances where compliance was not achieved at monitoring sites, the annual average limits for PM<sub>2.5</sub> were only marginally above these.

**Table 4: Number of NI PM<sub>10</sub> monitoring sites meeting the proposed new limit and objective values based on 2019-2024 air quality data annual mean data**

Year	Proposed new annual average limit value/objective (20 ug/m <sup>3</sup> )
<b>2019 (11 sites total)</b>	11
<b>2020 (11 sites total)</b>	11
<b>2021 (12 sites total)</b>	12
<b>2022 (11 sites total)</b>	11
<b>2023 (12 sites total)</b>	12
<b>2024 (13 sites total)</b>	13

## Comparison with other jurisdictions

Ireland and all jurisdictions in the UK have committed to or are currently considering implementing tighter annual average PM standards as demonstrated in Table 5. Implementing these new limits, targets and objectives for PM in Northern Ireland would enable greater alignment with neighbouring countries, reduce divergence and help to tackle transboundary air pollution.

**Table 5: Comparing particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>) annual mean limit, target and objective values in Northern Ireland, Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales:**

Country	PM <sub>2.5</sub> Annual Mean Limit, Target or Objective (ug/m <sup>3</sup> )	Equivalent WHO target/guideline level	Date to be achieved	PM <sub>10</sub> Annual Mean Limit, Target or Objective (ug/m <sup>3</sup> )	Equivalent WHO target/guideline level	Date to be achieved
Northern Ireland	25	Interim target 2	Existing commitment	40	-	Existing commitment
England	12	-	31 <sup>st</sup> January 2028	40	-	Existing commitment
	10	Interim target 4	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2040			
Scotland	10	Interim target 4	Existing commitment	18	-	Existing commitment
Wales	25	Interim target 2	Existing commitment	40	-	Existing commitment
	10*	Interim target 4	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2035			
Ireland	15	Interim target 3	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2026	30	Interim target 3	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2026
	10	Interim target 4	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2030	20	Interim target 4	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2030
	5	Air quality guideline	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2040	15	Air quality guideline	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2040

\*Currently being considered following a recent public consultation <https://www.gov.wales/fine-particulate-matter-air-quality-targets>

## **Linkages with wider plans and strategies**

***Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland:*** The development of these regulations to tighten PM standards will form a key action within the draft Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland. The draft Strategy and associated impact assessments are at an advanced stage of finalisation and it is intended that it will be issued for public consultation in late summer/early autumn 2026.

***Environmental Improvement Plan (EiP) for Northern Ireland*** <sup>(17)</sup>: Under the EiP a specific indicator has been developed for air quality, which considers annual mean urban background levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> (µg/m<sup>3</sup>) at five sites across NI. The EiP Annual Progress Report will assess this indicator to determine if air pollution levels are falling and therefore delivering environmental improvements. These regulations will help to support driving down PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions.

***Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2023-2027*** <sup>(18)</sup>: The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 requires that climate action plans include targets for air quality. The draft CAP sets the requirement for DAERA to consult on these new annual average PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> limits, targets and objectives. As PM and CO<sub>2</sub> often share the same combustion sources (fossil fuels, vehicles, industry) these new PM standards have the potential to contribute to Northern Ireland's first carbon budget, given the duty of Competent Authorities listed within air quality legislation to fulfill their role in achieving these new standards by 1 January 2028.

## **How we will monitor compliance.**

DAERA has a statutory requirement under the Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 to publish an annual report on a range of pollutants monitored in Northern Ireland (including PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>). This report is required to highlight details of all the cases where levels of pollutants have exceeded limit, values, target values and objectives.

Under the 2010 Regulations Northern Ireland Departments have a duty to ensure that the limit values are not exceeded and must ensure that all necessary measures not entailing disproportionate costs are taken to ensure that target values are not exceeded. In addition to this The Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 require district councils to review the quality of air within their area. The reviews must consider the current and likely future air quality and assess whether the air quality objectives are being met or are likely to be achieved within the relevant period. These Regulations also list a number of other Relevant Authorities in Northern Ireland, with important air quality responsibilities.

The Department will ensure that these annual reports continue to be produced to ensure compliance with these new limits, targets and objectives to inform the public, government and wider air quality community in Northern Ireland. These reports can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.airqualityni.co.uk/reports>

# Have your say

## How to respond to this consultation

This consultation seeks to gather your views on the proposed Regulations through a series of questions. These are provided in full within this document and are also available via the Citizen Space online platform. We encourage you to respond to this consultation document directly through the online survey.

This consultation will run for a 12-week period from 8 June 2026 to 31 August 2026. Early responses are encouraged but all responses should arrive no later than 11.59 pm on 31 August 2026.

We would request you consider responding to this consultation document either directly through the online survey which is accessible from the link below or via email to the email address below, however we also accept postal returns.

Please note extensions to provide responses to DAERA outside of the 12-week consultation period cannot be granted.

You can respond in one of the following ways:

- **Online Survey**

You are encouraged, wherever possible, to provide your responses to this consultation online via Citizen Space <https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/admin/daera/consultation-draft-air-quality-amendment-regs>

- **By Email**

You can submit your completed response by emailing the consultation team at: [PM.Regulations@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:PM.Regulations@daera-ni.gov.uk)

Email responses are limited to 1500 characters per question to mirror the requirements being set on Citizen Space. Email responses may take significantly longer to process than online submissions, so we encourage you to use the Citizen Space online survey.

- **By Post**

Postal responses are limited to 1500 characters per question to mirror the requirements being set on Citizen Space. Please be aware that postal responses will take longer to receive and process and so we encourage you to use the Citizen Space online survey. Please allow adequate time for delivery.

Responses can be posted to:

Air and Environmental Quality Branch

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

1st Floor Clare House

303 Airport Road West

Belfast

BT3 9ED

Guidance is provided on the 'Confidentiality of Responses under the Freedom of Information Act 2000', at page 23 below, for your reference.

If you require any further information, contact 028 9056 9835.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

Guidance is provided on your privacy and confidentiality on our website for your reference - [DAERA Privacy Statement](#)

Also, if you require any further information, please contact a member of the team on 028 9056 9835 or by emailing [PM.Regulations@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:PM.Regulations@daera-ni.gov.uk)

By responding to this consultation, your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances.

## Consultation Questions

### About you

1. *What is your name?*
2. *What is your email address?*
3. *What is your home postcode?*
4. *Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please confirm the name of the organization and you have the authority to respond on behalf of the organisation.*
  - Individual
  - Organisation
5. *Please indicate if you are happy for your response to be published.*
  - Yes
  - No
6. *If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please indicate if you are content for the name of the organisation to be associated with your response.*
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Applicable

### Proposed new annual average limits, targets and objectives for particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>).

7. *To what extent do you agree with the proposed new annual average limit value of 20 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for PM<sub>10</sub>?*
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree

Please share any further views or suggestions you have in relation to this question. (1500 character limit).

8. *To what extent do you agree with the proposed new annual average objective of 20 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for PM<sub>10</sub>?*
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree

- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please share reason for views or any further views or suggestions you have in relation to this question (1500 character limit).

9. *To what extent do you agree with the proposed new annual average limit value of 10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  for  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ?*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please share any further views or suggestions you have in relation to this question (1500 character limit).

10. *To what extent do you agree with the proposed new annual average target value of 8  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  for  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ?*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please share any further views or suggestions you have in relation to this question (1500 character limit).

11. *To what extent do you agree with the proposed compliance date of 1 January 2028 for these new limit values, target values and objectives for  $\text{PM}_{10}$  and  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ?*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please share any further views or suggestions you have in relation to this question (1500 character limit).

## **Impact Assessments**

*12. Do you agree or disagree with the conclusions of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)?*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please share any further views or suggestions you have in relation to this question (1500 character limit).

*13. Do you agree or disagree with the conclusions of the Equality and Disability screening?*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please share any further views or suggestions you have in relation to this question (1500 character limit).

## **Additional comments**

*14. Do you have any additional comments you wish to raise with regards to the draft Regulations or consultation documents? (1500 character limit).*

## **Next Steps**

Following the closure of the consultation, all feedback will be analysed and used to review the proposals. A summary of responses will be published on the DAERA website. DAERA will review all responses using a range of qualitative and quantitative analysis tools.

Recommendations will then be submitted to Minister Muir, who will consider the consultation responses before the Regulations are laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly by Negative Resolution with a view to coming into operation on 1 January 2028.

The Equality Impact Assessment, Child Rights Impact Assessment Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Regulatory Impact Assessment will also be reviewed following consideration of consultation responses.

## **Publication of Responses**

The Air and Environmental Quality Branch is leading the consultation on behalf of DAERA. A summary of responses will be published following the closing date for receipt of views. Your response, and all other responses to this publication, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses will not be treated as such a request.

## **Data Protection**

Section 8(e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this stakeholder engagement exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation.

## **Freedom of Information**

The Freedom of Information Act (2000) gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, DAERA in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this stakeholder engagement exercise, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. This means that information provided by you in response to this consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response.

The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and

- Acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

# Annex A: The Draft Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

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## STATUTORY RULES OF NORTHERN IRELAND

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2026 No. **XX**

### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

#### The Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Made - - - - - xx 2026

Coming into operation In accordance with regulation  
1(2) and (3)

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs(**a**) makes these Regulations in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 15(1), (2), and 15(5) of the Environment (Northern Ireland ) Order 2002(**b**).

In accordance with Article 15(6) of that Order the Department has consulted with—

- (a) such competent authorities as it considers appropriate;
- (b) such bodies or persons appearing to it to be representative of the interests of industry as it considers appropriate; and
- (c) such other bodies or persons as it considers appropriate.

#### Citation and commencement

1.—(1) These Regulations may be cited as the Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and shall come into operation as provided by paragraphs (2) and (3).

(2) Part I shall come into operation on 1 January 2027.

(3) Part II shall come into operation on 1 January 2028.

### Part I

#### Amendment of the Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003

2.—(1) The Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003(**c**) are amended as follows.

(2) In regulation 2, in column 1 of the Table, in each place the words occur, for—

- (a) “Department for Regional Development” substitute “Department for Infrastructure”;
- (b) “Department for Social Development” substitute “Department for Communities”;
- (c) “Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment” substitute “Department for the Economy”;

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(a) See S.R. [2016 No. 76](#)

(b) S.I. [2002/3153](#) (NI 7)

(c) S.R. [2003 No. 342](#)

- (d) “Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety” substitute “Department of Health”;
- (e) “Department of the Environment” substitute “Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs”;
- (f) “Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation” substitute “Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation”.

(3) In regulation 3(2), for “the period beginning with the date on which these Regulations come into operation and ending on the date set out in the third column of the Table in the Schedule which relates to that objective” substitute “a period of 12 months, the first such period being the period beginning with 1 January 2027 and ending with 31 December 2027, and subsequent relevant periods being periods of 12 months beginning with the day after the end of the previous relevant period.”

(4) In regulation 4(1) omit “by no later than the date set out in the third column of that Table for that substance and level”.

(5) In the Schedule, for the table substitute the following table—

<b><i>“Pollutant</i></b>	<b><i>Air Quality objective levels*</i></b>
Benzene	3.25µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a running annual mean
1,3-butadiene	2.25µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a running annual mean
Carbon monoxide	10mg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a maximum daily running 8 hour mean
Lead	0.25µg /m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as an annual mean
Nitrogen dioxide	200µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a 1 hour mean, not to be exceeded more than 18 times a year  40µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as an annual mean
Sulphur dioxide	350µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a 1 hour mean, not to be exceeded more than 24 times a year  125µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a 24 hour mean, not to be exceeded more than 3 times a year  266µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a 15 minute mean, not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year
Particles (PM <sub>10</sub> )	50µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as a 24 hour mean, not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year  20µg/m <sup>3</sup> when expressed as an annual mean”.

(\*) µg/m<sup>3</sup>: micrograms per cubic metre

## Revocation

3. The Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 are revoked.

## Part II

### Amendment of the Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010

4.(1)The Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010(a) are amended as follows.

(2) In regulation 6(1) for “Annex II of the Directive” substitute “Section A of SCHEDULE 9”.

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(a) S.R. [2010 No. 188](#)

- (3) In regulation 6(3) for “Annex II to the Directive” substitute “Section B of SCHEDULE 9”.
- (4) In regulation 11(1) for “Section 1 of Annex II to Council Directive 2004/107/EC” substitute “Section A of SCHEDULE 9”.
- (5) In regulation 11(3) for “Section II of Annex II to Council Directive 2004/107/EC” substitute “Section B of SCHEDULE 9”.
- (6) In Schedule 2—
- (a) in the table for PM<sub>10</sub> in the second column opposite calendar year for “40 µg/m<sup>3</sup>” substitute “20 µg/m<sup>3</sup>”.
- (b) for the table for PM<sub>2.5</sub> substitute the following table—

“ **PM<sub>2.5</sub>**

<i>Averaging Period</i>	<i>Limit Value</i>
Calendar year	10 µg/m <sup>3</sup> .

- (7) In Schedule 3, in the table for “PM<sub>2.5</sub>” for “25 µg/m<sup>3</sup>” substitute “8 µg/m<sup>3</sup>”.
- (8) After Schedule 8 insert Schedule 9 which is set out in the Schedule.

## SCHEDULE

### “SCHEDULE 9 regulation 4(7)

Determination of requirements for assessment of concentrations of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>), lead, benzene, carbon monoxide, arsenic, cadmium, nickel and benzo(a)pyrene in ambient air within a zone or agglomeration

A. Upper and lower assessment thresholds

The following upper and lower assessment thresholds will apply:

#### 1. Sulphur dioxide

	Health protection	Vegetation protection
Upper assessment threshold	60 % of 24-hour limit value (75 µg/m <sup>3</sup> , not to be exceeded more than 3 times in any calendar year)	60 % of winter critical level (12 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )
Lower assessment threshold	40 % of 24-hour limit value (50 µg/m <sup>3</sup> , not to be exceeded more than three times in any calendar year)	40 % of winter critical level (8 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )

#### 2. Nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen

	Hourly limit value for the protection of human health (NO <sub>2</sub> )	Annual limit value for the protection of human health (NO <sub>2</sub> )	Annual critical level for the protection of vegetation and natural ecosystems (NO <sub>x</sub> )
Upper assessment threshold	70 % of limit value (140 µg/m <sup>3</sup> , not to be exceeded more than 18 times in any calendar year)	80 % of limit value (32 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	80 % of critical level (24 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )
Lower assessment threshold	50 % of limit value (100 µg/m <sup>3</sup> , not to be exceeded more than 18 times in any calendar year)	65 % of limit value (26 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	65 % of critical level (19.5 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )

#### 3. Particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>/PM<sub>2.5</sub>)

	24-hour average PM <sub>10</sub>	Annual average PM <sub>10</sub>	Annual average PM <sub>2.5</sub> (a)
Upper assessment threshold	70 % of limit value (35 µg/m <sup>3</sup> , not to be exceeded more than 35 times in any calendar year)	70 % of limit value (14 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	70 % of limit value (7 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )

Lower assessment threshold	50 % of limit value (25 µg/m <sup>3</sup> , not to be exceeded more than 35 times in any calendar year)	50 % of limit value (10 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	50 % of limit value (5 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )
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<sup>(a)</sup> The upper assessment threshold and the lower assessment threshold for PM<sub>2.5</sub> do not apply to the measurements to assess compliance with the PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure reduction target for the protection of human health.

#### 4. Lead

	<b>Annual average</b>
Upper assessment threshold	70 % of limit value (0.35 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )
Lower assessment threshold	50 % of limit value (0.25 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )

#### 5. Benzene

	<b>Annual average</b>
Upper assessment threshold	70 % of limit value (3.5 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )
Lower assessment threshold	40 % of limit value (2 µg/m <sup>3</sup> )

#### 6. Carbon monoxide

	<b>Annual average</b>
Upper assessment threshold	70 % of limit value (7 mg/m <sup>3</sup> )
Lower assessment threshold	50 % of limit value (5 mg/m <sup>3</sup> )

#### 7. Arsenic, cadmium, nickel and benzo(a)pyrene

	<b>Arsenic</b>	<b>Cadmium</b>	<b>Nickel</b>	<b>B(a)P</b>
Upper assessment threshold in percent of the target value	60 % (3,6 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )	60 % (3 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )	70 % (14 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )	60 % (0.6 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )
Lower assessment threshold in percent of the target value	40 % (2,4 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )	40 % (2 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )	50 % (10 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )	40 % (0.4 ng/m <sup>3</sup> )

#### B. Determination of exceedances of upper and lower assessment thresholds

Exceedances of upper and lower assessment thresholds shall be determined on the basis of concentrations during the previous five years where sufficient data are available. An assessment threshold shall be deemed to have been exceeded if it has been exceeded during at least three separate years out of those previous five years.

Where fewer than five years' data are available the Department may combine measurement campaigns of short duration during the period of the year and at locations likely to be typical of the highest pollution levels with results obtained from information from emission inventories and modelling to determine exceedances of the upper and lower assessment thresholds.

## **EXPLANATORY NOTE**

*(This note is not part of the Regulations)*

These Regulations are made in exercise of the powers under Article 15(1), (2) and (5) of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002.

These Regulations make amendments to air quality secondary legislation in Northern Ireland.

Regulation 2 makes amendments to the Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. It inserts the current names of Competent Authorities. It amends the definition of relevant period so that the 'relevant period' is a period of 12 months beginning with 1<sup>st</sup> January and ending with 31<sup>st</sup> December each year. It amends the annual average of PM<sub>10</sub> and 1 hour mean for sulphur dioxide.

Regulation 3 revokes the Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

Regulation 4 makes amendments to the Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 to update the limit value for PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> and updates the target value for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. It also adds in a new Schedule outlining the upper and lower assessment thresholds of pollutants and determination of their exceedances.

## Annex B: Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

<b>Anthropogenic</b>	Caused by humans or their activities
<b>AQEG</b>	Air Quality Expert Group
<b>Carbon Budget</b>	Sets a limit on the maximum amount of greenhouse gas emissions that can be produced over a five-year period.
<b>Carcinogen</b>	A substance that causes cancer
<b>Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) Screening</b>	The initial, preliminary stage of a structured evaluation process that determines if a proposed policy, law, or budget decision significantly impacts children's rights. It helps decide whether a full, in-depth CRIA is required, focusing on mitigating negative effects and aligning with the UN Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC).
<b>Citizen Space</b>	An online consultation platform used by the Northern Ireland Civil Service to host public consultations. It allows individuals and organisations to view, participate in, and respond to government surveys and policy proposals. The platform supports transparency and public engagement in decision-making processes.
<b>Climate Action Plan (CAP)</b>	Policies and proposals to achieve reductions in greenhouse gas emissions within the associated Carbon Budget period and the actions to enable this to happen.
<b>DAERA</b>	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
<b>District Council</b>	11 single-tier local government bodies responsible for local services.
<b>Emissions</b>	An amount of a substance that is produced and sent out into the air that is harmful to the environment.
<b>Environmental Improvement Plan (EiP)</b>	A statutory, long-term blueprint developed by DAERA to protect, restore, and improve the natural environment.
<b>Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)</b>	A structured process used by public authorities in Northern Ireland to assess whether a proposed policy, strategy or decision is likely to have an adverse impact on people from the Section 75 equality groups. It is carried out in line with the statutory duties set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which require public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.
<b>Limit value</b>	Concentrations of pollutants that must not be exceeded
<b>NI</b>	Northern Ireland
<b>Objective</b>	Concentrations of pollutants not to be exceeded within the defined relevant period. Requirement for district councils to designate air quality management areas and develop action plans in pursuit of achieving prescribed objectives.
<b>Particulate matter (PM)</b>	Condensed phase (solid or liquid) particles suspended in the atmosphere.
<b>PM<sub>10</sub></b>	Particles with a diameter less than 10 µg

<b>PM<sub>2.5</sub></b>	Particles with a diameter less than 2.5 µg
<b>Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) screening</b>	A preliminary, fast-track process used by policymakers to determine if a proposed regulation or policy requires a full, in-depth impact assessment. It helps determine if a policy will cause significant, direct, or indirect costs or savings for businesses, the public sector, or voluntary organisations.
<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)</b>	A mandatory, structured process, required under the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 ensuring public authorities consider the social and economic needs of rural communities when developing policies, plans, or public services. It focuses on reducing isolation, inequality, and improving access to services.
<b>Target Value</b>	Concentrations of pollutants that should not be exceeded by ensuring all necessary measures not entailing disproportionate costs are applied.
<b>µg</b>	A microgram is a metric unit of mass equal to one-millionth of a gram or one-thousandth of a milligram.
<b>µg/m<sup>3</sup></b>	Micrograms per cubic meter is the standard unit for measuring air pollutant concentrations, such as particulate matter, representing the mass (µg) of a pollutant in a given volume (m <sup>3</sup> ) of air.
<b>WHO</b>	WHO World Health Organisation

## Annex C: Reference List

1	<a href="#">The Northern Ireland Act 1998</a>
2	<a href="#">The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016</a>
3	<a href="#">Air Quality Expert Group - Fine Particulate Matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) in the UK</a>
4	<a href="#">British and Irish Heart Foundation - Air Pollution and Mortality on the Island of Ireland Summary</a>
5	<a href="#">International Agency for Research on Cancer - Press Release No 221</a>
6	<a href="#">Breath of Danger: Unveiling PM<sub>2.5</sub>'s Stealthy Impact on Cancer Risks</a>
7	<a href="#">British and Irish Heart Foundation - Air Pollution and Mortality on the Island of Ireland Report</a>
8	<a href="#">Air Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland 2005-2023</a>
9	<a href="#">Draft Ammonia Strategy Consultation</a>
10	<a href="#">The Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010</a>
11	<a href="#">Directive 2008/50/EC on Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe</a>
12	<a href="#">The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002</a>
13	<a href="#">Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003</a>
14	<a href="#">WHO global air quality guidelines - Particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide</a>
15	<a href="#">A Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland – Public Discussion Document</a>
16	<a href="#">Air quality NI data selector</a>
17	<a href="#">Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland</a>
18	<a href="#">Northern Ireland's draft Climate Action Plan 2023-2027</a>

**For further information:**

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Department o'  
**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**