

## Directives on Polluting Emissions

On 27 September, 2001 the EU's Internal Market Council adopted two Directives on restricting polluting emissions (sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, dust particles) from large combustion plants. These Directives also set national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants: sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), volatile organic compounds (VOC) and ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>).

The European Parliament has also given its final seal of approval to the agreement reached with the Council, which will cut acid rain and smog and help the EU implement its Kyoto Protocol commitments by cleaning up Europe's air.

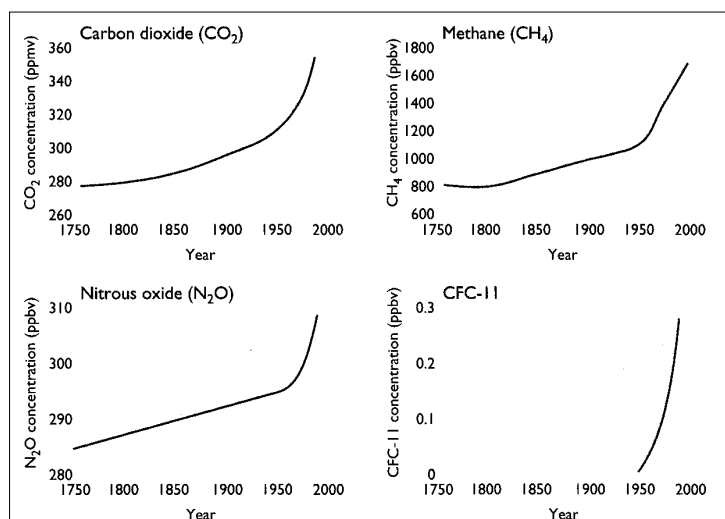
Parliament held out during the two years of negotiations with Council to make the laws tougher. It succeeded at first reading in including older, dirtier plants in the directive on large combustion plants, which was originally only intended to cover power stations built after 1987. Its delegation won stringent caps on nitrogen oxide, sulphur oxide and dust emissions in exchange for concessions designed to save older, mostly coal-fired, plants from closure.

The thorniest issue was the nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) cap. Under the compromise deal the strict new NO<sub>x</sub> limit won by Parliament will apply to new and old plants from 2016

– a crucial benchmark for the Eastern European accession countries – but plants operating at peak times only will be exempt from it. Anthracite power plants will, however, have to apply it from 2018.

The other part of the package sets tight national ceilings to be met by the Member States for the four key atmospheric pollutants noted above. In a victory for Parliament, 2020 is set as the benchmark date for achieving the long-term goal of keeping within critical limits and protecting people against the health risks caused by air pollution. 2010 is the interim target date for achieving the binding limits set for each Member State.

An ambitious review clause also requires the Commission to report in 2004 and 2008 on the progress being made in meeting the targets; and it must also examine the pollution caused by aviation and shipping. (MJ)



Concentrations of the greenhouse gases CO<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>O, CH<sub>4</sub> and CFC-11 in the atmosphere since 1750  
Source: IPCC  
Courtesy: Europe's Environment