

Air pollution data in Port Talbot

A collaborative approach to developing good evidence to use in decision making



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Port Talbot

Overview

The Port Talbot Particulates Data Team has developed a collaborative approach to developing data and information. By bringing together key partners to gather and monitor air quality data, future decision making can be based on robust environmental evidence which will support sustainable development decision making.

Background

Historically, Port Talbot has been subject to high levels of air-borne particle pollution, referred to as PM10 (particles less than 10microns in diameter), which is generally attributed to the industrial nature of the area. This has led to the designation of an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) by the Local Authority. The AQMA covers the majority of the residential area between the steelworks and the M4 motorway.

The PM10 emissions are largely attributed to the large steel works complex, however there are also emissions derived from other sources outside of this complex, including road transport, road salting, domestic sources, construction projects, natural sources (such as sea spray), and trans-boundary sources.

Results

Identify outcomes that increase the wellbeing of Wales

Evidence

Make decisions using better information

Collaboration

Work with others across boundaries

Long term

Fix the causes rather than the symptoms

Connect

Focus on the economic, social and environmental benefits

Transparency

Measure and report on the difference you make

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

Why

The extremely small size of PM10 particles, which are generally not visible, allows them to penetrate deep into the lung where they can aggravate respiratory disease. Poor air quality has implications for human health, with the knock-on costs to the health service and potential effects on the local economy in terms of availability of a healthy workforce. Improving air quality is therefore a key objective for the Welsh Government, along with a strong commitment to protecting human health and wellbeing and the environment.

The 1995 Environment Act requires local authorities to make improvements in local air quality. In addition, Welsh Ministers have ongoing concerns of the potential risk that concentrations of PM10 within Port Talbot may exceed the relevant daily mean limit value set in the EU Directive and domestic regulations on ambient air quality. The Directive sets a limit value for the daily mean concentration of PM10 at 50 micrograms per cubic metre, which is not to be exceeded more than 35 times in a calendar year. Failure to adhere to European Directives leaves us open to infraction fines, which can be substantial.

What they did

Pollutants covered by the EU Directive on Air Quality are monitored by a network of automatic air quality monitors utilised for reporting to the EU, additional local authority monitors and a Natural Resources Wales monitor. The monitors and the collected data are continuously assessed by air quality experts. They are also subject to formal periodic quality assurance audits (by specialist consultants), to ensure their accuracy and robustness.

A range of interested partners have now developed a collaborative approach to better understand the air quality in Port Talbot. This collaborative approach takes place in the following fora, with representation from the Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and local industries associated with the steelworks complex, since the steelworks has been identified as a significant contributor to PM10 emissions:

- **Steering Group:** meets three times a year, with the purpose of reviewing ongoing strategic work and directing research, trial and capital resources appropriately.
- **Regulators Group:** meets three times a year to review the actions being taken by the regulators and Welsh Government in Port Talbot.
- **Data Team:** meets monthly to review the data on PM10, and improve the management and interpretation of the data to enable informed actions to be undertaken across the different organisations. The Data Team also provides updates to the Steering Group to enable them to undertake strategic and resource planning.

The Data Team is the technical working group that scrutinises existing evidence and defines what future work is required to maintain and improve it. This evidence base underpins the development of effective actions to reduce PM10 concentrations in Port Talbot. It is tasked with reviewing the information on PM10 and improving the management and interpretation of data across the different organisations.

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The group assesses the outcomes of analytical work and the effectiveness of investments and trials undertaken to manage air quality within the defined limits.

Key elements of the PM10 Data Team work are externally peer reviewed, to help ensure that the Team's work programme remains focussed on its objective to provide a fit for purpose and robust evidence base, and that it is making best use of the scientific data and methodologies.

The collaborative Data Team approach is intended to help minimise the risk of having more than 35 breach days by the end of a calendar year, and ensuring that strategic decisions are based on the robust evidence.

What changed

Since initiating the Data Team approach there is evidence that all stakeholders are better equipped to respond to changes in air quality. Partnership working between Government, regulators and industry provides a basis for decisions to be made effectively and with the best information available.

Growing and improving these working relationships will help to further strengthen our ability to improve the air quality for the residents of Port Talbot. The process also provides transparency so that key organisations such as the steelworks and regulators can work more closely and understand all the factors that influence air quality over a period of time.

What they learned

Making information on air pollution levels available to the public has been an important aspect. Wherever possible, up-to-date information regarding zones, concentrations, and alerts of breaches of air quality standards are viewable by anyone through the UK Air Quality website and the Welsh Air Quality Website. Sharing information has helped to let the public scrutinise regulatory decisions, as evidenced through the technical nature of recent enquiries.

The data, information and evidence generated through the PM10 Data Team could be utilised to inform sustainable development decisions, particularly with regards to environmental limits.

Contact and Links

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[Clean Air for Port Talbot: Short Term Action Plan](#)

[Understanding PM10s in Port Talbot](#)

[Welsh air quality website](#)

[UK air quality website](#)

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