

air quality



The air contains a wide variety of particles, vapours and gases, some natural, some man-made. Those that are considered harmful to human health, harmful to the environment, or a potential nuisance are called pollutants. The Government, with advice from health experts, has set limits for each of these pollutants to help inform the public about air pollution levels.

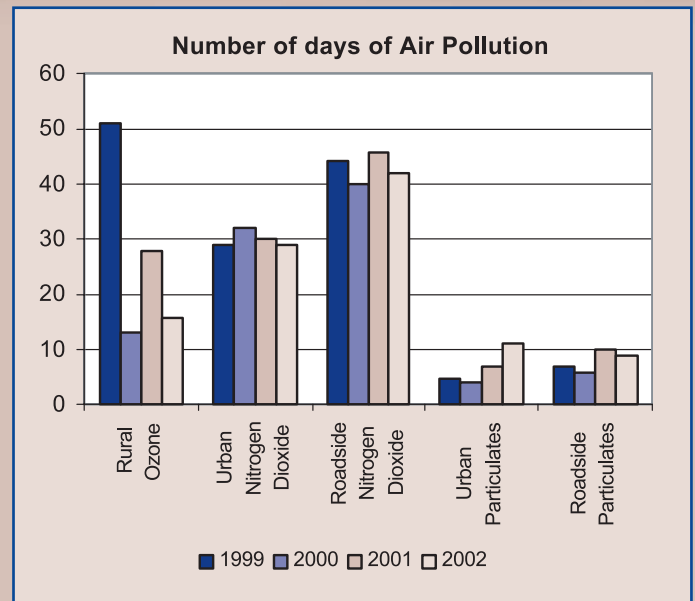
Indicator QoL27 - Number of days of Air Pollution

Indicator QoL27 is used to illustrate whether air quality is getting better or worse in Hertfordshire. The indicator is calculated using accurate measurements collected continuously from a number of monitoring sites around the county. It has five separate values:

1. the number of days in which ozone levels in rural areas exceeded the Government's standard;
2. the number of days in which particulate levels in urban areas exceeded the Government's standard;
3. the number of days in which particulate levels close to busy roads exceeded the Government's standard;
4. annual mean nitrogen dioxide levels in urban areas and
5. annual mean nitrogen dioxide levels close to busy roads.

Not all districts and boroughs in Hertfordshire have the facility to calculate these indicators. Therefore, one overall set of indicator values has been calculated for the whole of the county. Where possible, results from a number of districts are used to produce an average.

The graph shows how the five air pollution indicators have changed for Hertfordshire since 1999. Local pollution levels are dependent on a range of factors including traffic levels, vehicle technology, imported pollution from other areas such as London and continental Europe, and the weather. Changes in emissions from traffic and other sources of pollution are usually very gradual, so short-term variations in the indicator are largely due to weather conditions. A warm sunny summer



will cause the rural ozone indicator to go up, whereas a cold, still winter will cause the urban and roadside indicators to go up.

Most of the indicators for 2002 were lower than 2001. The only one to go up was the urban of particulates indicator. This is partly because local sources of particles close to the monitoring sites including braziers burning during the firefighter's strike and bonfire night celebrations. Air quality monitoring in Hertfordshire is co-ordinated through the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Air Pollution Monitoring Network. More detail on the monitoring network including measurements, reports and daily bulletins can be found through the Network's website: www.seiph.umds.ac.uk/hbnet.htm.

Local authorities in Hertfordshire have to make regular detailed studies of air pollution levels throughout their areas. Where they estimate that air quality will not meet the Government's standards by specified dates, they have to produce Action Plans describing how they intend improving the situation. Visit your local authority's website to find out more about this review and assessment process.

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