

Smog levels way above safe limits in northern Italy

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"Italian cities need to breathe again," the country's environmental organization, Legambiente, warned on Monday, as it reported that the first month of 2017 has seen nine Italian towns pass safe limits for air pollution on at least half of the days.

The news came as several northern cities imposed traffic blocks in an effort to combat air pollution. The environmental councillor in Pavia, a university town in Lombardy, advised residents to stay indoors as much as possible and avoid using cars.

In Turin and Rome, where safe limits for fine particles have been exceeded for several consecutive days, authorities have imposed traffic blocks on the most polluting vehicles.

In the capital, the most polluted areas included Via Tiburtina and Via Praenestina - both narrow streets lined by tall buildings - and the busy Corso Francia.

But the Villa Ada park, the city's second largest green space, also showed worrying levels of fine particles. According to Legambiente's regional president, Roberto Scacchi, the fact that smog had reached even open spaces showed "the situation is serious, and the smog is everywhere".

In Rome, cars account for 70 percent of the smog, while only 30 percent of the problem is down to heating or heavy industry. Traffic blocks, applying to scooters and motorbikes as well as cars, were in place from Wednesday, affecting the most polluting vehicles (if you're in Rome, check the [city hall's website](#) for the latest restrictions).

Scacchi argued that the restrictions should be more extensive, however, and called for more traffic lanes and improvements to be made to improve public transport in order to tackle the pollution problem long-term.

The smog is worsened by the fact that northern Italy hasn't seen any significant rainfall in over two months, and while meteorologists have forecast rain by the middle of the week, which should provide temporary relief, Scacchi said more permanent measures were needed. "You can't just do a rain dance, waiting for it to come and wash away pollution," he warned.

On a national level, the most polluted town of 2017 so far is Cremona in Lombardy, where safe limits for fine particles have been surpassed for 20 days already this year. Turin follows with 19 days over the pollution limit, then Frosinone in Lazio at

18, and Padua, Vicenza and Reggio Emilia had all passed the limit of 15 days.

"The data doesn't bode well," said the Legambiente [Mal'aria](#) (Bad air) report, which was published on Monday.

Environmental activists presented the report at the regional offices of Emilia Romagna, along with the association's proposals to combat smog. Some carried banners reading 'Our lungs are breaking! No to smog'.

The dossier is a follow-up to a 2016 study, which showed that 33 Italian towns had gone over the annual limits of Pm10, with Turin, Frosinone, Milan and Venice the worst offenders.

"The air quality in Italian towns needs to become a government priority, on a local, regional and national level," warned Legambiente's national president, Rossella Muroni. "Otherwise we will continue to condemn Italian citizens to breathe in polluted air."

Among the suggestions put forward by Legambiente were ideas for redesign of roads and public spaces, upgrades to public transport and more green areas in the city.

According to the latest estimates, air pollution causes more than 467,000 deaths in Europe each year, with the associated health costs amounting to between €400 billion and €900 billion annually.

READ ALSO: [Half of children in Turin at health risk due to smog](#)



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