

22.11.01

11 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for the Environment regarding monitoring of air quality (OQ.107/2022):

Will the Minister advise what monitoring of air quality, if any, is currently being undertaken in St. Helier and around Island schools?

Deputy J. Renouf (The Minister for the Environment):

I thank the Deputy for the question. Let Minister for the Environment start by saying that I am very aware of the importance of air quality in terms of public health and the quality of life. I also recognise that urban areas, particularly St. Helier, are where air quality is generally likely to be poorest, while air pollution around schools is a particular concern because of its potential impact on growing bodies with the consequent lifelong potential health effects. Air quality is currently monitored at fixed locations throughout the Island by units that provide on the one hand continuous monitoring as well as, on the other hand, diffusion tubes that record longer-term trends. The vast majority of this monitoring takes place in town. Air pollution monitoring falls into 2 main categories: nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter. The continuous monitoring station for nitrogen dioxide has been in place at the central market since January 2008. In November of 2021 the unit was relocated to Beresford Street. In addition, non-automatic diffusion tube samplers are used for monitoring long-term nitrogen dioxide levels at 22 sites across the Island. Of these, 18 are in St. Helier with 2 sited at schools outside St. Helier at St. Saviour and Les Quennevais. These record total monthly nitrogen dioxide levels. These diffusion tubes do not provide peak concentrations but rather cumulative data to give an indication of general air quality in the area and provide an opportunity to make longer-term comparisons. In terms of particulates, there are 2 continuous analysers at Beresford Street and Howard Davis Park that monitor particles of a mean aerodynamic diameter of 10 microns and 2.5 microns. That is PM10s and PM2.5s. Unfortunately, the analyser at Beresford Street is currently offline. A suite of 4 hydrocarbon monitors that sample benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes are also placed at a further 6 sites in St. Helier. The air quality officer in Natural Environment is currently developing a more reliable and comprehensive air quality monitoring network that will be able to provide near real time air quality data that will be readily accessible to the public and all key stakeholders.

4.11.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Minister reassure parents of children in town schools that the air that their children are breathing on the way to school is safe, below World Health Organization levels that would create concern, and that we know of the quality of that air around schools? Because it was mentioned about around town but it was not mentioned as to whether they are near schools in particular.

Deputy J. Renouf:

As my original answer will have made clear, we still have some deficiencies in our monitoring network which we are hoping to correct, and that is a significant priority. Money has been allocated from various funds, the Climate Emergency Fund initially and then the Government Plan, to address the instruments' deficiencies. However, within the data that we have our levels of monitored pollution are lower than current World Health Organization guidelines. The caveat to that is that in 2021 the World Health Organization proposed reducing its nitrogen dioxide levels to a level of 10 milligrams - I think I am correct in saying, 10 in any case - and our current most recent figures was 21. Those new World Health Organization guidelines will be extremely demanding for all

jurisdictions to achieve, so I think getting more data to find out where we have a problem will be a critical imperative over the next few months.

4.11.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

The area in St. Helier and, indeed, in the whole Island which has the worst pollution is the tunnel under Fort Regent. Will the Minister explain whether he thinks that it is a good idea for people to walk through the tunnel potentially twice a day with young children? Would he consider steps to try and reduce or even stop the tunnel from being used for pedestrian access?

Deputy J. Renouf:

It is an interesting question from the Deputy. I appreciate the point. As somebody who has cycled in London for 20-odd years with their nose far too close to the exhausts of buses, it is certainly a concern of mine that we should not be exposing particularly young people to excessive levels of pollution. I would say that a journey through the tunnel does not take a huge amount of time and so these things need to be judged on a common-sense level. Once we have some decent monitoring in place I think we will be in a better position to say, but I would not be myself alarmed at walking through the tunnel on the assumption that I did not linger and hang around.

4.11.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am glad that the message to not linger or hang around in the tunnel is a strong message from Government. I do not think that there is much space to hang around in there. More seriously, though, I would question whether it would be wise to downplay the risk from the tunnel itself. If you are somebody who has been walking through the tunnel twice a day perhaps over 30 or 40 years, and including if you are one of those babies that I see being pushed in a pram along there twice a day potentially without having any choice in the matter, that is a very serious potential health issue there. He does not need to give an answer now, but would the Minister consider giving the issue of the tunnel and its alleviation more thought, which may also include restructuring it so that there can be pedestrian access but which is completely sealed off on one side of the tunnel?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I am perfectly happy to commit to looking into that in more detail and to make recommendations in conjunction with my colleague the Minister for Health and Social Services accordingly. In passing, I would note that a baby that was going through there for 30 or 40 years would be quite an unusual baby, but thank you.

4.11.4 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Drawing upon his experience of London and cognisant of the fact that this Minister has not been part of a previous Council of Ministers, would he not agree with Minister for the Environment that the record of past Councils of Ministers in regard to air quality monitoring and tackling the problem at its heart is absolutely lamentable? Will he undertake to discuss with the Minister for Infrastructure in particular the kind of solutions to the problem that are being used by almost every London borough and council, particularly preventing cars from getting anywhere near the school playgrounds where their fumes are causing such a problem?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I will not be tempted into commenting on my predecessors, but I will say on the second part of the Connétable's question that, yes, I am very keen to work with my colleagues in Government to reduce air pollution significantly, particularly as we move forward with tighter World Health

Organization guidelines. I do think that it is something quite interesting to note that during lockdown the monitors kept on monitoring and the reduction in traffic in the second lockdown led to a 60 or 70 per cent reduction in pollution. The correlation between traffic and pollution is very clear and we have strong policies to try to deal with that, but I fully accept that we need to work much more quickly, much more strongly and much more urgently to try and ensure that they bite.

4.11.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do feel this is a tradition for Minister for the Environment to raise air quality monitoring in this Assembly. I will just say to the Minister: does he recognise that the importance of clear data is one of the things that will drive the cultural change to stop people using their cars around schools and in town when they see the damage that is being done and what comes from their exhausts?

Therefore, it is an urgent need to increase monitoring and increase the publication of those levels and inform the public.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I am very pleased to be able to participate in the tradition of answering questions about air quality from the Deputy. Yes, I am very committed to this and I mentioned in my first answer that this is an area where we are putting in significant extra resources with a view to providing exactly that kind of real time or near real time data so that we can point out and react when the data suggests that pollution is at a high level and we can take appropriate measures. I think it is tremendously important for people to see where that air quality spikes, where there are bad air quality areas, and then we can act on it. I would also just in passing make a comment about the importance of seeing this in the wider context of our carbon neutral strategy and the desire to increase active travel, to increase use of public transport and to increase the shift to E.V.s (electric vehicles), all of which taken together will be beneficial towards air quality and are the reason why when I talk about the carbon neutral roadmap I always try and emphasise the co-benefits that will arise. So, I am very happy to agree with the Deputy's point.