

Paris bans old diesels to tackle pollution

1 July 2019, by Clare Byrne



Activists stage a "die-in" on June 4, 2019 to denounce the air quality outside the French National Assembly in Paris

Paris on Monday banned all diesel vehicles aged 13 years or over from the city centre, the latest move in a campaign to tackle pollution on the city's streets.

Diesel vehicles over 18 years old and petrol vehicles over 21 years old are already banned in Paris—a measure that was extended Monday to a new "low-emissions" belt surrounding the city.

Central Paris meanwhile went further by also banning diesel cars, trucks and motorbikes aged 13 years and over—a move aimed at cleaning up the air in a city that is regularly shrouded in smog.

Motorists who flout the traffic restrictions in central Paris, which were trialled during last week's heatwave, face a 68-euro (\$77) fine, rising to 135 euros for trucks and buses.

A Greenpeace report listed Paris as the worst western European capital for small particle air pollution in 2018, with levels higher than cities such as the Philippines capital Manila or the Colombian capital Bogota.

Beyond the city's boundaries, the authorities are also clamping down on polluters in the 47 districts that ring the central Paris region, which are home to around 5.5 million people.

Unlike in central Paris, however, offenders in the suburbs, where car dependency is greater, face no punishment for the first two years of the ban.

The government agreed to a two-year punishment-free "learning period" after resistance from some mayors who feared that the ban could rekindle the "yellow vest" protests, which erupted late last year among motorists furious over fuel price hikes.



Mayors in Parisian suburbs feared the ban could rekindle the anger of the "yellow vest" protests, which erupted last year over fuel price hikes

The protests quickly escalated into an anti-government revolt, marked by weekly demonstrations in cities around France that have regularly turned violent.

Reflecting on the lessons learnt, a senior official for the greater Paris area, Patrick Ollier, told reporters last week: "We don't want to force the environment on people, but rather that it be accepted as the outcome of dialogue."

The subject of air quality has become a burning issue for governments across the EU, where green parties made strong gains in May's elections to the European Parliament.

In November, Madrid followed a handful of other European cities that have restricted traffic in their centres.

But whereas London, Stockholm and Milan have sought to dissuade motorists by driving into the city centre by hitting them with congestion taxes Madrid went further, banning many vehicles from accessing the centre altogether and fining them if they did.

In France, air pollution causes 48,000 extra deaths a year, according to the health service, making it the country's second-biggest killer after smoking, ahead of alcohol.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo has restricted car access and promoted walking and cycling in central Paris in a bid to banish the smog that periodically shrouds the capital.

The city aims to phase out the use of diesel cars by the time it hosts the Summer Olympics in 2024.

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