

International Day of Clean Air for blue skies



CLIMATE &
CLEAN AIR
COALITION
TO REDUCE SHORT-LIVED
CLIMATE POLLUTANTS



Key Messages

Clean air is a triple win for our health, climate and the economy

Clean air saves lives, strengthens the economy, enhances quality of life, protects the climate, and opens doors for innovation. We're making progress — and we know how to do it. Now it's time to accelerate. **Air pollution is the second leading cause of death globally, surpassing tobacco**

- Acting on air pollution could save over 8.1 million premature deaths every year.
- The very young are particularly vulnerable: 93% of children under 15 breathe air so polluted that it harms their health and development, increasing risks of respiratory infections, asthma, and harming fetal growth and cognitive function. This is due not only to their biological vulnerability, but also to greater exposure, as most live in low- and middle-income countries where urban air pollution far exceeds safe limits.
- In the elderly, air pollution increases risks of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other neurodegenerative conditions.
- The cost of reducing air pollution is far lower than the escalating health, economic, and social costs of inaction.

Frontrunners are proving that progress is possible – but we need to pick up the pace

- Some cities and countries have achieved impressive reductions in air pollution, showing that targeted action delivers results, with health, climate and economic co-benefits.

What's needed now is political leadership, investment in capacity, and the adoption of cleaner solutions across key sectors — including clean energy, sustainable transportation, greener industrial practices, cleaner household cooking fuels, and alternatives to burning agricultural residue and municipal waste. **Almost everyone on the planet is still running through polluted air - but not everyone is running on the same track**

- 99% of the world's population breathes air that fails World Health Organization's (WHO) air quality standards.

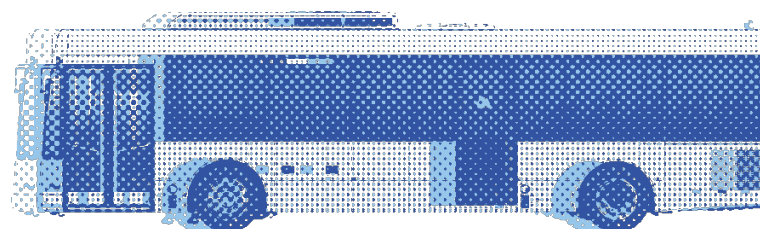
- Air pollution worsens global inequality: 89% of premature deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Within countries, it is the most vulnerable (children, older people, women, low-income communities, and people with existing health conditions) who are most exposed and least protected, making existing inequalities even worse.
- Air pollution affects low-income communities disproportionately, with 700 million people breathing unsafe air while living in poverty.
- To win the race for everyone, action must focus on where pollution levels and health risks are highest. We must not leave them behind.

This is both a sprint and a marathon – and we need to win on both fronts

- Science tells us that air pollution and climate change are interlinked problems requiring integrated solutions.
- Decarbonization is the marathon: shifting to renewable energy, electric transport, and cleaner industry for long-term air and climate benefits.
- Cutting super pollutants like methane and black carbon is the sprint that delivers fast wins: tackling them could slow warming up to 0.6°C while cleaning the air almost immediately.

Invest in clean air pays off

- Not only does air pollution have an enormous impact on human health, global warming, ecosystems, and climate – it also poses an enormous economic burden to society.



- Air pollution drains up to 6.5% of the global economy through health costs, lost productivity, and environmental damage. Delaying action further means these losses will continue to grow.
- Cutting just one major pollutant, PM2.5, could boost productivity by up to a third and create jobs across sectors.
- Tackling methane could save over 250,000 lives every year while reducing climate warming.
- Reducing ground-level ozone pollution could prevent up to USD 33 billion in annual crop losses, strengthening food security.
- Clean air solutions offer immediate, measurable returns for public health, economies, and the environment.

This is a global relay, and everyone has a leg to run

- Air pollution does not recognize borders and slows everyone down. It is a global crisis that requires collective action from governments, businesses, and individuals.
- We know where to pick up the pace. Whether you walk, bike, advocate, or innovate: your actions matter.
- Clean air is a right, not a reward. No one should have to run in toxic air; everyone deserves a fair start and a clear shot at the finish line.

The finish line is in sight – but action must accelerate.

- Adopt an integrated approach that links climate and air quality solutions to deliver health, climate, and food security benefits
- Set strong national air quality standards, aligned with WHO guidelines, and backed by clear action plans.
- Cut pollution from key sectors:
 - Ensure clean cooking fuels for all to eliminate household smoke.
 - Remove the dirtiest vehicles from the roads, clean up fuels, and expand clean public transport like electric buses.
 - Stop open burning of waste and crop residues through better waste management.
 - Use cleaner technologies in industries and power plants.
- Focus efforts on protecting the most affected people – including children, women, and low-income and marginalized communities – to reduce health inequalities and ensure a fair transition.
- Invest in solutions and build local skills and institutions to help countries act faster.

We're not out of breath. We're out of excuses for not cleaning the air.

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. Emphasizing the need to make further efforts to improve air quality, including reducing air pollution, to protect human health; acknowledging that improving air quality can enhance climate change mitigation and that climate change mitigation efforts can improve air quality; the United Nations General Assembly decided to designate 7 September as the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.

Contact UNEP

For general enquiries about the day, organizations can contact cleanairblueskies@un.org.

For more details on Clean Air Day regional activities and to connect with UNEP experts, regional offices can be contacted:

Africa:

Thomas Ogola
Public Information Assistant
thomas.ogola@un.org

Asia and the Pacific:

Panvirush Vittayaphakul
Senior Public Information Assistant
vittayaphakul@un.org

Europe:

Alejandro Laguna
Regional Information Officer
laguna@un.org

Latin America and the Caribbean:

Carlos Gomez
Regional Information Officer
carlos.gomezdelcampo@un.org

North America and New York Office:

Laura Fuller
Regional Information Officer
laura.fuller@un.org

West Asia:

Hoda El-Turk
Regional Information Officer
elturk@un.org

UNEP Headquarters:

Atif Butt
Chief, Public Advocacy
atif.butt@un.org

Soraya Smaoun

O.i.C Pollution and Health Unit,
Air Quality Coordinator
soraya.smaoun@un.org

For media enquiries, email us at unenvironment-newsdesk@un.org.