

2019.02.12

5 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for the Environment regarding the monitoring and reporting of air quality: [OQ.39/2019]

Will the Minister explain what monitoring and reporting of air quality is carried out, especially on busy roads and in the vicinity of schools?

Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade (The Minister for the Environment):

There are 2 different methods of air quality monitoring which are used by our environmental health team. The first is passive air quality monitoring which is carried out in over 23 locations across the Island where air quality is thought to be worst. Two of these are near a school. The results do not give us a real time update, they give us the results for a month. They do not give us peaks and troughs of that analysis but they are important. The second method is near real-time air quality monitoring which is carried out in 2 locations, one of those is in the Central Market where traffic is heavy and often at a standstill, and at Howard Davis Park. Those results and the real-time results are published on the gov.je website so people can see how the variations happen in conditions of traffic and other factors. In relation to schools, the environmental health team, also with the eco-active and education officers, do incredible work working together with schools to develop an air quality education package for schools to enable them to understand the air quality around their schools and understand the air quality and pollution issues. That is a voluntary scheme and the schools that participate will be able to monitor their air quality. This project is due to launch in June to coincide with the Clean Air Day, which is a national initiative in many locations throughout the U.K.

3.5.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Is he satisfied that only 2 real-time locations are going on and certainly none of those it appears to me to be in the critical areas around the main schools where traffic, as Members know and the public knows, is backed up at school run times, particularly Mont Millais, College Hill and Wellington Hill in particular where the air quality is noticeably bad if one is walking rather than driving one's car? Will he undertake to see if we can improve the number of locations where real-time monitoring is taking place as a lot of European towns and cities are?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, I share the Constable's concern. I think our environmental health team have taken the lead on this work in Jersey and been very proactive in it. It has not that long been assigned to the Ministry of the Environment. The real-time monitoring is obviously more expensive, more sophisticated and I certainly would like to see that extended. At the moment the technique is to pick up both the oxides of nitrogen, also any particulates and so on. I absolutely agree with him that I think we need to do more and, in fact, it is essential, I believe, that we need more and more evidence of what is, I believe, a serious problem. But having said that, thankfully, the quality of air in Jersey is very good but, unfortunately, we do have these hotspots of traffic-based pollution. Of course, children, being at a lower level are much more affected by these contaminants from vehicles.

3.5.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

The Minister almost answered my question. Having said that Jersey's air quality overall is very good, having looked at the results, how would the Minister describe the quality of air in these hotspots near schools as a general overarching comment?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, it is difficult. I think we all know that the air quality changes according to the weather, whether we are in still air, and in the locations. It is very variable, so thankfully if one is still on the north-west coast of St. Ouen one gets some of the finest air quality probably in the world. But, unfortunately, if you are living in the streets of town, in the bowl of St. Helier when there is a temperature inversion and you get accumulations it is poor. In fact, I refer the Deputy to the written answer that was given to Deputy Tadier by myself on 9th October 2018, in particular in relation to the tunnel where there is no question there is very poor air quality in that particular location. It is something that I want to do more about and I think the answer is let us do something about vehicles.

3.5.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Looking at the government website for his department it currently states that at Howard Davis Park the monitoring unit is undergoing essential repairs and will be reinstated as soon as possible. It seems that we only have one live monitoring going on in Jersey at the moment. Does the Minister know why that particular device is out of action, when it came out of action and when we can expect it to be back online?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I thank the Deputy for his alertness. I should have realised that Members, of course, can check the website from in here. I am sorry, I did not know it was down. I am very disappointed to hear that and I will undertake to find out the answer to the Deputy's question and get this sorted out.

3.5.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Minister to confirm that things such as carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, low-level ozone which are really dangerous for children, particularly if you are asthmatic, and other solid particulate levels are measured within particularly the centre of St. Helier? Otherwise we cannot give health risk updates in emergency situations, such as in the middle of summer when the temperature makes such a difference to the air quality in that area.

Deputy J.H. Young:

I do have a basic scientific understanding but I am sure the Deputy has considerably more scientific understanding than me. The information I have is that particular ones where monitoring takes place are the oxides of nitrogen and indeed the particulates, which I think is P.M. (particulate matter) 2.5 or something which is a very small particle of solid matter which is the things that get in people's lungs and causes that serious damage. Those things are emitted by diesel vehicles. The other things, yes, they do cause health aspects. I think in time we will need ... there is a thing called an air quality strategy and there are matters generally ... for example, the presence of radon gas within dwellings. No question, radon gas obviously is an air quality issue and that does cause health hazards. I think what I would like to do in answer to the question is to promise to come back to the Deputy with a more thorough analysis of the air pollution issues for him, and circulate it to Members if they wish.

3.5.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

The previous Minister of the then titled D.f.I. (Department for Infrastructure) admitted to the States that we have failed and his department has failed to meet its traffic reduction targets as set out in the last policy. We have no recent policy or strategy to reduce traffic, effectively we are operating - if he will excuse the pun - in a vacuum. Will the Minister undertake to get his fellow Minister at the department now called G.H.E. (Growth, Housing and Development) to prioritise this matter which clearly does affect people's health, particularly if we are trying to get more children to walk and cycle to school?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, this is absolutely one of my priorities but, as the Constable said, under our current organisation I do not have that direct responsibility. For example, when I met with Guernsey, the president of the Environment Committee, I was asked what are our air standards, traffic air standards. Are we going to set a limit or a date by which we will end pollution from diesel vehicles? I had to say: "Well, I do not have that responsibility." I know, of course, throughout Europe other towns are doing so. They are setting very, very clear targets. Now that sort of thing I am hoping will come out of the work that the Council of Ministers are doing under the Common Strategic Plan. I am pleased to say that the Minister for Infrastructure and I are both working on that group and the officers now are not in the gift of myself or the Minister for Infrastructure, we are working cross-government. I am very hopeful... there is a strong conviction that this is something we have to address in the timescale of this States. I make that commitment and I will do my best.