

2019.06.18

9 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for the Environment regarding the progress made in relation to air pollution monitoring: (OQ.160/2019)

Can I ask the Minister, further to the answer to Written Question 237/2019, what progress, if any, has been made in relation to air pollution monitoring?

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

I thank the Deputy. The question is very timely as this Thursday is the Clean Air Day in the United Kingdom and there is a series of events supported by Defra (Department for Energy, Food and Rural Affairs), the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly. I am pleased to report that in Jersey very good progress has been made by our environmental health team with respect to the near real-time air quality monitoring across the Island. Of course, we have already got 2 functioning on the Island's website and in that database. It is hoped that the first 50 sensors of the projected 300 will be in place by the end of August and the selection of sites includes every school in the Island and tunnel. In relation to the lightweight monitors we plan to use on the supervised walks to school, which the Deputy's written question referred to, we could not use those on 12th June, because the weather was not suitable for air-quality monitoring and we will be rescheduling that. The data by these monitors will assist evidence-based policy decisions and inform us in our progress towards cleaner air and zero carbon emissions.

3.9.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The written question gave a date of 12th June, which is obviously now not going to happen. Can we have a date when real-time air monitoring around our schools will happen, given that every day and every week in which children encounter severe air pollution affects their health?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I have tried to help the Deputy and I have said they will be in place by the end of August. The work is being done by the Environmental Health team, with commercial partners that are experts in the field and obviously this gets down into operational detail; can I tell where and on what day they are going to be in? No, I cannot, but we said 12th June, because that was planned and obviously there was the weather. I am sorry that I cannot, but what I will do is I will undertake to get a programme and let the Deputy have a copy of it as soon as we can.

3.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that the single place in Jersey with the worst air pollution is the tunnel and will he join me for a walk through the tunnel sometime at peak time, to see if we can enjoy that little stroll and decide what could be done about improving the air quality in there, or perhaps restricting access to pedestrians at peak times?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Firstly, I am sure the Deputy, of course, knows that I am not responsible for what use the tunnel is put to and what the infrastructure is. Those responsibilities sit with the Minister for Infrastructure. My task, as the Minister for the Environment, is to make sure that we monitor where pollution is known and we make that known to people and we give people advice. I suffer from chest problems and I, personally, would not wish to walk through the tunnel, unless I had to. The advice is that fitter people can do so without risk, but no doubt about it: for people with chest infections and others the advice is not to and also when you use cars to close the windows and turn off the air conditioning

and so on. All of that helps, but at the end of the day we have a choice on this Island. We can either accept all this pollution, or have policy choices and try to do something about it and reduce emissions and remove vehicles.

3.9.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister says that the advice is that fitter people can walk through the tunnel and that people who are not very fit should not. So, perhaps, the fitter people are fit enough to walk right around the tunnel and not need to go through it in the first place.

[10:45]

Does the Minister agree that even though he is not responsible for it, we do still labour under the hopefully not false pretence that there is this thing called 'one car', which is being peddled to everybody inside and outside the States and that it is important that Ministers do work together to find a solution to air quality, which must necessarily come under his department and that of the Minister for Infrastructure?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I think the Deputy describes a utopian position. There is no question that Jersey suffers from air pollution from vehicles, the same as all over the U.K. If I look at the U.K. website, there are hundreds of sites and you can compare our pollution levels with elsewhere. Choices will be necessary. The Assembly has already directed that the Council of Ministers, the Minister for Infrastructure and I, produce a plan. When that plan comes back, I will look forward to the decisions of what you do, as to when you set the dates for carbon pollution vehicles to be removed from our environment, or phased out and introduce financial measures to make sure that happens. I look to all of you to support that, rather than just have lip service to policies and doing nothing about it.

3.9.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

The Minister talks about utopia. He will be aware, I am sure, of the sustainable transport charity, Sustrans, in the U.K., but what he may not have seen is a tweet, just this morning, where they say - and this is not in relation to today's question - that they have worked with Lambeth Council for 3 years measuring air pollution around school gates. Is he aware that most local authorities are way ahead of Jersey in terms of monitoring air pollution, particularly around schools? Will he undertake to work with the relevant Ministers, not only the Minister for Transport - I will not say embattled - not only with the Minister for Infrastructure, but also with the Minister for Education to bring into play some policies that remove the number of idling cars around our schools?

Deputy J.H. Young:

The Connétable is absolutely right. There is much more to be done. I think at the moment the Environment team has relied upon its low budget solutions. We have an excellent outreach programme that goes into the schools through Eco Active and the public awareness and awareness in schools and the commitment to these matters, to these improvements, is coming. But, of course, now is the time we need to put real action in place. I look to my colleague, the Minister for Infrastructure, to help me do that. I cannot do it on my own, but I will make sure the Connétable's suggestions are followed and particularly I would be very surprised if the Minister for Education does not support that fully.

3.9.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Do the Minister's plans for measurement of air pollution include some form of measurement of the carbon particulates from wood-burning stoves that are a serious and growing problem?

Deputy J.H. Young:

It is obviously in the realm of the Senator's technical knowledge, which is far superior to mine. I rely on what the published sources tell me: that the air quality monitoring in the U.K. is done on PM10s and PM2.5s. PM2.5 seems to be the most damaging issue, because this gets into the very fine ... it penetrates your lungs. I do not know what size the particulate matters of wood-burning stoves are, but I know there are issues where they are a problem in enclosed valleys and so on. I think that is an issue that I shall speak to the Environmental Health team about.

3.9.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is very interesting to hear the Minister talk about low budget solutions. I wonder what the cost of our children's health is to us all, financially, in this Assembly. But my question is: what advice would the Minister give to parents, given that we have absolutely no information on the level of pollution their children are facing in terms of taking care of that risk, or would he just suggest: "It is OK, we have not monitored it for so long, so why does it matter now"?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Well, I do not think there is absolutely no information, because we do have those 2 sites that are in town and Members can see that the levels do compare with the U.K. in urban centres. I can recall, way back in the past, there was certainly action taken, for example, in First Tower School. First School Tower is on an inner road, where there was considered to be air pollution in that playground and what did they do? They went into a scheme to put the playground at the back and to use that for car parking. I do not think it is fair to say that these issues have been not understood, but there are school sites where playgrounds are very close to roads and those are going to have to have priority. What advice can I give? The advice I will give is that I will certainly discuss it and arrange a meeting between the Minister for Education and the Medical Officer of Health, to try to see what advice we can give in the interim. But there is no question, the real advice is to let us do things about reducing vehicle emissions and let us do things about reducing vehicles. So, there we are. But I will have that meeting and I will undertake to come back with more detailed information for the Deputy on that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

For clarification, I was talking about the real-time monitoring around schools. That has not happened. We know there are 2 sites, but we know there is no real-time monitoring around specific schools. That is what I was saying.

The Bailiff:

Thank you for that clarification.¹

¹ Deputy J.H. Young has since indicated that on 25th June 2019 he met with the Minister for Education, the Medical Officer of Health and Environmental Health Officers in order to discuss the advice given to parents in relation to air quality around schools and is able to clarify the following: As part of the implementation of the real time air quality sensors at every school in the Island, officers will work with head teachers to agree how parents and students can be better informed of air quality matters. Officers from the Environmental Health and eco active teams are already working on an educational package for schools. This is being piloted now and will allow those schools which choose to take part to monitor air quality around their school to better understand air quality, pollution issues and to take part in a citizen science project.