

ESG Radio broadcast on health and pollution 2007

My main concern is related to raising awareness in respect to the health implications of air pollution. I don't think its useful to apportion blame to one particular component but to look more objectively at the overall air quality we are all breathing and how that can be improved. To insist there is nothing wrong with the air quality of Gibraltar is counter-productive and will lead to no improvements. Most of us only have to use our eyes and sniff the air to tell something is not right!

Awareness, understanding and positive action to improve our air is the way forward to a better and healthier future for us all.

Human bodies are complex systems and each is unique this means that each person will react to toxins in a different way depending upon their particular sensitivities. These sensitivities are influenced by an array of factors including genetic predisposition, strength of immune system, stress levels, lifestyle choices including diet, exercise and smoking. **The toxins do not act in isolation to other factors but in conjunction with them.**

However there should be an overall pattern of disease emerging when specific toxins are consistently released into the air- such as respiratory problems including asthma, bronchitis, blood disorders such as anaemia, high levels of infection including flues and colds, higher levels of cancer such as breast cancer, leukaemia and brain tumours. These patterns are complex and take years to analyse, this is why science is always one step behind human experience and why I would value symptoms and experience over and above legal limits of toxins.

We all know that reducing pollution in our local environment would help improve health- we shouldn't wait for symptoms of disease to rise to a serious level before action is taken!

Air pollutants are never from one source and there are a variety of toxins from different activities which all accumulate to form a cocktail which we are then breathing into our lungs. This cocktail is forever changing and each day we are exposed to a new flavour but as a community we do have the ability to alter the toxicity of this mixture!

In Gibraltar the cocktail is made up of toxins from the **refinery**, from certain **bunkering** activities within the bay, from our own **power generators** which are run on diesel oil, some **shipyard** activities and from **traffic pollution**.

All are of equal importance however as proximity to the source is vital (in relation to health problems) the issue of traffic is of serious concern. There are very few places where residents and pedestrians are so close to traffic congestion. I have witnessed changes being implemented in Ireland which led to vast improvements in air quality. They enforced regulations upon exhaust emissions making sure that some inefficient cars were updated to become cleaner and greener and the worst offenders were destroyed. They implemented park and ride facilities in major towns and offered subsidised public transport which reduced congestion.

As Gibraltar has such a simple road network and all of us appear to go in the same direction at the same time of day there has to be a practical alternative such as a tram system perhaps. I know change is difficult to implement and to get used to but the price is small in comparison to what the effects of pollution will ultimately be! Our children deserve the effort!