New initiative to measure outdoor air quality at schools across Europe

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Air pollution Environment and health Transport

Air pollution is a growing concern in Europe and globally. CleanAir@School initiative is putting focus on air quality around Europe’s schools by involving children, parents and teachers in measuring pollutant concentrations. The project is a joint initiative of the European Environment Agency and the European Network of the Heads of Environmental Protection Agencies.

The EEA and the European Network of the Heads of Environmental Protection Agencies (EPAs) have launched a citizen science initiative to monitor air quality around European schools. The participating schools measure nitrogen dioxide (NO2) concentrations with reliable, simple low-cost devices, placing one sampler beside the road in front of the school and one in a less polluted area, such as the school backyard.

CleanAir@School

Children at participating schools learn about air pollution and its health effects during the project. Parents also get to see how road transport affects air quality, and the project explores whether this knowledge leads parents to shift away from bringing their children to school by car. A short questionnaire will track any changes in awareness and behaviour. Participating environmental protection agencies also engage with local communities and explain how the EPAs work to improve air quality.

Besides raising awareness on air quality, the initiative explores how data collected by citizens might complement official air quality data. At a European level, this can support the European Commission’s efforts to streamline environmental reporting, in particular to ‘promote the wider use of citizen science to complement environmental reporting’.

Background

The EEA’s 2018 ‘Air quality in Europe’ report showed that, while strong policies and local actions have helped decrease levels of pollution in Europe’s cities, most Europeans living in urban areas still suffer from pollutant levels that are above the World Health Organization’s recommendations for the protection of human health. According to the EEA estimates, long-term exposure to fine particulate matter pollution in the air is responsible for more than 400,000 premature deaths in Europe every year.