

Air pollution deaths in south Essex revealed

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Smog over Basildon

Hospital

AIR pollution kills 375 people a year in south Essex with many more having years shaved of their lives, health experts estimate.

Councils are considering lowering speed limits and urging people to reduce car use as new figures from Public Health England laid bare the impact of car emissions and industry on people's lives.

People with asthma were warned to stay indoors after smog settled over the area for several days earlier this month.

Dr Andrea Atherton, director of public health for Southend Council and [Thurrock](#) Council, said: "This report clearly shows that particulate air pollution continues to have a significant effect on health and reducing concentrations of this pollutant would lead to significant gains for public health."

For the first time, the report estimates the number of deaths in each local authority area attributable to long-term exposure to air pollution.

They are calculated by modelling annual average concentrations of man-made particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter, known as PM2.5.

Southend had the worst figures, with 115 deaths and 1,022 years of life lost, but Dr Atherton blames this on the borough's higher overall death rate, caused by an ageing population.

[Basildon](#) and Thurrock both had higher concentrations of particulate air pollution, which could be dust, ash or soot.

Thurrock, which contains the M25, the Dartford Crossing, the [A13](#), Tilbury Power Station, Tilbury Docks, the new DP World superport and many heavy industrial areas, had to declare 15 air quality management areas, where it may not meet national standards.

Each area has an action plan detailing how it will improve.

[Rochford](#) District Council declared an air quality management area at Rawreth Industrial Estate and nearby streets in June 2010.

It was revoked last March as resurfacing of the estate roads, reorganising and resurfacing of certain sites to reduce the levels of vehicle contamination had helped improve air quality.

As a new town industry is largely separate from residential areas in Basildon, so road traffic emissions are the principal source of air pollution.

A spokesman said: “The challenge for us is to ensure that as the borough evolves, developments are carefully planned to maintain separation of the people from known areas of poorer air quality.

“Furthermore, while we have not had to declare any air quality management areas in Basildon, we are continuously striving to seek improvements through initiatives like the introduction of reduced speeds on the major feeder roads into town, which is a good example of a common sense measure.”