

COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT REPORTING IN 2021 DUE TO COVID-19

Delays and resourcing constraints

The Scottish Government is aware that measures in place to combat the spread of Covid-19 may have impacted local authority resource for air quality work and therefore may cause delays in reporting. The statutory deadline of 30th June for the year 2021 will remain but we will take a flexible and realistic approach when there is a risk that this deadline may be missed. We will ask authorities write to us if they require an extension due to Covid-19 for 2021 reporting, so we can consider and respond to requests based on the specific circumstances of each local authority. We will ask local authorities to do so by emailing andrew.taylor2@gov.scot, copying in tanith.allinson@gov.scot outlining how resources have been impacted and the extension they wish to apply for. Each request will be considered on a case by case basis.

Reporting on Covid-19 in 2021 APR templates

The Scottish Government will alter the 2021 Annual Progress Report (APR) template to include a 'Covid-19 impacts' section. Standard lines to include will be provided and we will encourage local authorities to summarise and discuss the local impacts of Covid-19 that have been observed. Accompanying this guidance is a short survey prepared by SEPA seeking information on the impact that Covid-19 has had on monitoring capabilities. Local authorities are asked to complete and return the survey by 1st April 2020 to tanith.allinson@gov.scot

AQMA Status

We recognise that air pollutant concentrations may have been significantly impacted by the change in activity observed across Scotland and the rest of the UK as a result of Covid-19 and associated measures. This may have led to compliance with air quality objectives in Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in the year 2020. The Scottish Government's current guidance states that monitoring data should show compliance with objectives over a minimum period of three consecutive years when considering the revocation of an AQMA, as well as national trends in emissions and measures introduced as part of an Air Quality Action Plan. Any revocations being currently taken forward or planned on the basis of pre 2020 data should continue. The suitability of 2020 datasets as part of the evidence base for future revocations will be considered on a case by case basis.

Impacts on 2020 monitoring data

Covid-19 and associated measures may have impacted data capture and quality of both diffusion tubes and continuous analysers. Scottish Government advice is as follows:

- **Data capture:** In regard to poor data capture, current guidance will remain. Where data capture is less than 75% of the year, annualisation techniques can be used to estimate an annual average from a part year average, as current guidance states. There must be three months of data available for annualisation.
- **Annualisation:** We are aware that the ability to annualise data in line with current guidance may have also been impacted by Covid-19. We are considering the impacts of relaxing the criteria for annualisation, such as the relaxation of the 50-mile distance criteria

and will consider the most appropriate sites against which to annualise. Information collected from the SEPA survey will help inform a final decision on annualisation.

- Impacts to diffusion tube exposure dates: guidance issued earlier in the year stipulated that where it was not safe to do so, or if resource needed to be deployed elsewhere, there was no expectation that local authority officers should expose diffusion tubes in line with the 2020 Diffusion Tube Monitoring Calendar dates. A diffusion tube exposure trail currently being undertaken will inform advice on how to use data from diffusion tubes exposed outside of recommended diffusion tube calendar periods. Whilst APRs must flag inaccurate data, we will encourage presenting and discussing the data, asking authorities to make it clear how monitoring was impacted and highlighting that such data should be treated with caution if appropriate. We will also ask authorities to acknowledge that data from this year may differ significantly when compared with long-term trends. In order to communicate clearly with the public on the impact on Covid-19 on data capture and quality we will introduce a simple rating system for monitoring data from diffusion tube and continuous analysers. This rating system will indicate where readers need to treat data with more caution, where, for example, data capture was less than 75% and changes to the annualisation criteria have also had to take place. Data that cannot be annualised should still be reported but with an appropriate caveat.

Diffusion Tube Bias Adjustment

We would like to get an early indication of how local and national diffusion tube bias adjustment studies have been affected by Covid-19. We will be issuing a survey via email in due course to determine impacts and inform decision making. We are willing to consider extending the deadline for the inclusion of studies if the benefits of doing so are found to be significant.

Potential adjustment of LAQM tools

The Scottish Government is aware that there may need to be adjustment of some of the tools used by local authorities in their assessment of air quality. We will update authorities in due course when we have conducted analysis on what the impacts are likely to be on the tools and alterations, if any, needed. Adjustment to tools will depend on data inputs such as the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory (NAEI) and Department for Transport forecasts.

2020 Data for Dispersion Modelling Verification

We are currently considering the approach to take in regard to using 2020 monitoring data for Dispersion Modelling Verification as part of detailed modelling studies, Air Quality Action Plans (AQAPs) or planning related work. The Scottish Government advises the use of 2019 for model verification.