

Pollution and Poverty- Breaking the link

New evidence linking pollution and poverty

This new research from Friends of the Earth reveals the stark links between deprivation and pollution.

We took the latest pollution data from the Environment Agency - covering a range of chemicals emitted to air, water and land by large factories. We then compared the location of these factories and the levels of emissions with the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation - which ranks all 8,414 local authority wards in England in several categories (health, education, income, employment, housing and access to services). The comparison reveals that deprived communities bear the brunt of factory pollution. This study focussed on emissions to air of chemicals recognised as being carcinogenic (cancer causing).

The results show that factories are found predominantly in more deprived wards (see graph 1). Also, the worst of the pollution is found overwhelmingly in the most deprived wards (see graph 2). Of the 11,400 tonnes of carcinogenic chemicals emitted to air in England in 1999:

- 66% of carcinogen emissions are in the most deprived 10% of wards
- 82% of carcinogen emissions are in the most deprived 20% of wards
- Only 8% of carcinogen emissions are in the *least* deprived 50% of wards

The case for action

Everyone should have the right to live in a clean, safe environment. There is no place in a modern society for factories spewing out thousands of tonnes of carcinogenic chemicals. This alone should be cause for strong action to reduce pollution from factories.

But the fact that this pollution is also in the most deprived areas of the country makes action even more vital. It is morally wrong that on top of all the other problems that poorer communities face, they should have to bear the burden of factory pollution as well. Environmental problems are clearly a part of the social exclusion, inequality and deprivation that the Government has promised to tackle.

The Government must act on these promises, improving people's health and quality of life, and reducing social exclusion by reducing pollution in people's communities.

Recommendations for Government Action:

1 Cut Factory Pollution by 80% by 2005.

Friends of the Earth is calling for an 80% cut in factory pollution by 2005, and our new research adds extra weight to these calls. The Environment Agency should launch a campaign to deliver these reductions, with a priority to clean up the dirtiest factories. An 80% reduction in the pollution from just the 10 factories emitting the most carcinogens, would give a reduction of 57% in the total amount of carcinogen emissions for the whole of England.

2 The Social Exclusion Unit should include environmental exclusion as a key part of its next programme of work.

Factory pollution is not the only environmental problem which hits the poorest hardest. Traffic pollution is also worse in more deprived areas. The distribution of environmental impacts, and its causes, is an under-explored issue - as acknowledged by the Environment Minister (1). The Social Exclusion Unit has noted these issues in its work, it is currently undertaking "*scoping of possible topics for a future work programme*". It should research the causes and extent of environmental exclusion in this work programme.

Key questions for this programme include:

- What is the pattern of distribution of environmental impacts? Which people suffer?
- What are the causes of the pattern of distribution of environmental impacts?
- What is needed to address this situation?

3 Draft new statutory guidelines for regeneration strategies to ensure that only quality economic growth - that does not compromise people's health or the environment - is delivered.

The most deprived communities suffer from multiple problems. Regeneration policies should look at jobs, economic growth, environmental quality and community needs as connected issues, not as separate unrelated problems. To break the link between poverty and pollution, regeneration strategies must not repeat the mistake of aiming for economic growth irrespective of its effects on people's health and environmental quality. Yet, despite the Government stating that "*quality of growth matters; not just quantity*"(2), the success of economic policies including regeneration is measured primarily in terms of quantity. New and clear statutory guidelines for regeneration strategies could correct this.

These guidelines should explicitly address the need to reduce toxic pollution. They should be applied to all regeneration strategies including the Regional Economic Strategies and strategies financed by European structural funds. The guidelines should ensure that any support given to industries that emit toxic pollution, such as developing industry clusters in regional economic strategies, is only on condition that the total emissions from the industry are reduced significantly year-on-year. Reducing toxic pollution will have the added benefit of making regeneration areas more attractive to employers, and so boost job creation opportunities.

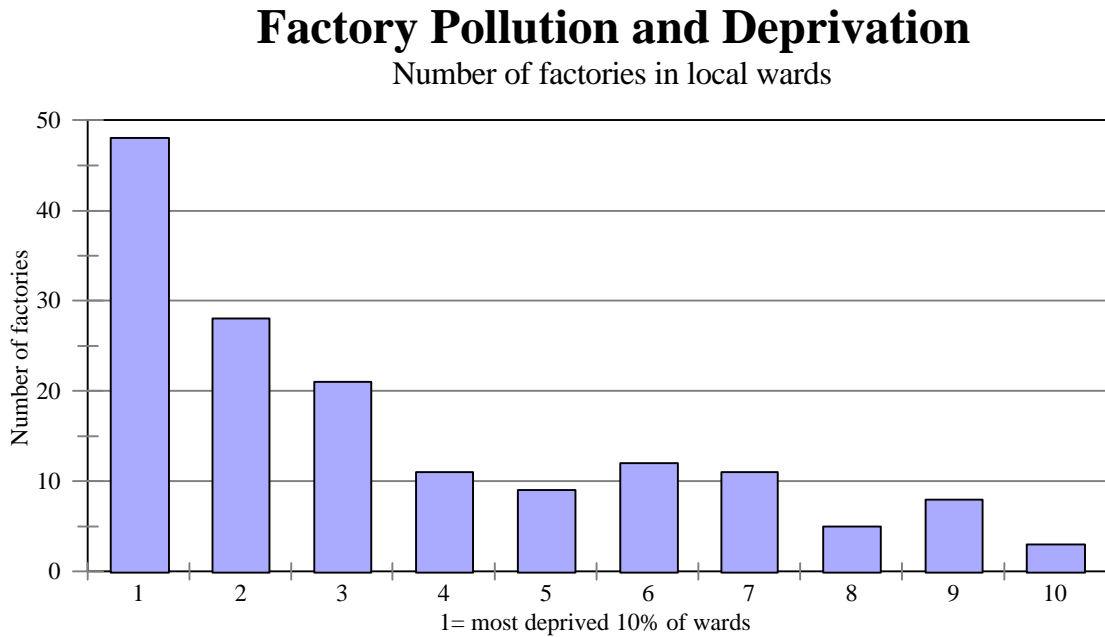
4 The Government should introduce an indicator of environmental deprivation in the next update of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) wanted to include an environmental index in the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, they said that they did not have enough quality data "*...that could be applied at small area levels.*"

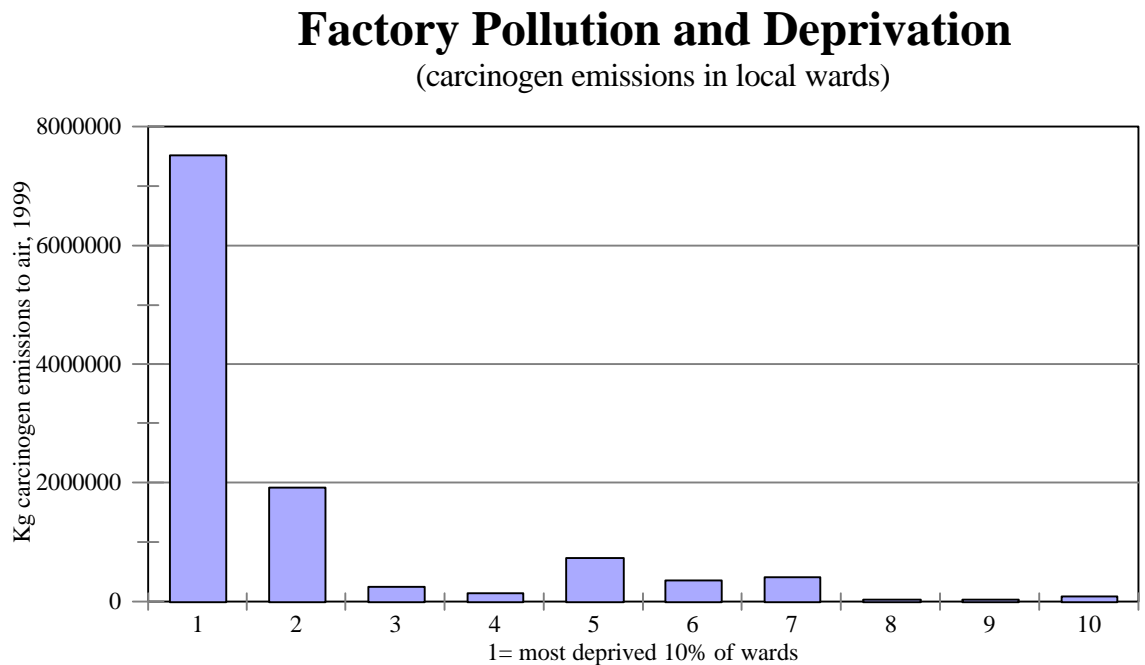
The DETR should use the Environment Agency's factory data as the basis for an initial environmental index. This can be developed to include air pollution from other sources (such as traffic).

Pollution and Poverty Results:

Graph 1 Factory numbers against deprivation:



Graph 2: Factory emissions against deprivation:



[Note: the 8414 wards were broken into 10 parts - on the graph, “1” is the most deprived 10% of wards - wards 1 to 841; 2 is the next most deprived 10% - wards 842-1682, etc. The pollution data covered all factories in England emitting more than 1,000 kilogrammes of carcinogens into the air in 1999. There are 156 of these factories.]

References

(1) “*There has been far too little research in this country into the social effects of environmental degradation*”. Michael Meacher, 1999. In Boardman, B, et al. *Equity and the Environment*. London, Catalyst Trust.

(2) HM Treasury 1997 Statement of Intent on Environmental Taxation

Further Information

For information about polluting factories in your area, and for further details of this study, see FOE’s factory watch website: www.foe.co.uk/factorywatch

The analysis in this briefing expands on a pilot 1999 study - also see www.foe.co.uk/factorywatch

This research is part of Friends of the Earth’s work on “Environmental Justice” - ensuring that everyone in the UK can live in a healthy environment, without compromising the health or quality of life of people in other countries or generations. See www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/sustainable_development/research_progs/env_just_prog.html

Friends of the Earth Scotland also campaign on Environmental Justice - see www.foe-scotland.org.uk/nation/ej1.html

Other Friends of the Earth International member groups also campaign on environmental justice issues, for example FOE Ecuador. See cosmovisiones.com/DeudaEcologica/campa.html

Other resources on Environmental Justice in the UK include:

Environmental Justice: From the Margins to the mainstream. Publication by the Town and Country Planning Association, Nov 2000.

Environmental Justice in a divided Society - proceedings from a conference at Goldsmith’s College, February 2000: www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/academic/an/environmental2.html

In 2001, a briefing on environmental justice will be published through the Economic and Social Research Council’s Global Environmental Change Programme.

Also in 2001, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation will also be publishing research on “Environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups”.

The following website contains a good summary of Environmental Justice work in the USA:

www.ejrc.cau.edu

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