



TechTalk

Paris's New Anti-Pollution Measures©

by John McCarthy

Hi everyone and a very warm welcome once again to TechTalk. July the 1st is inexorably drawing nearer, and this is bad news for all in the Parisian region who own cars registered before January 1st 1997, because the City of Lights intends to curtail access to the capital to all such vehicles. Indeed, diesel coaches, buses and HGVs dating prior to 2001 have already been banned from Paris, and as from July 1st 2016 – in a mere four weeks' time - petrol and diesel cars registered before 1997 will also be forbidden from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays. By 2020, only vehicles made in or after 2011 will be allowed freedom of access. Passenger cars, two-wheeled motor vehicles and light commercial vehicles affected by these measures will still be permitted on week-ends, while the ban will be permanent for the buses, coaches and HGVs concerned.

Draconian anti-pollution measures have been pretty much on the cards since the French capital briefly topped the world charts for air pollution not so long ago. Since then, Paris has banned cars in many historic central districts at week-ends, has imposed odd-/even bans on vehicle number plates during periods of peak pollution, has made public transport free during major pollution episodes and has encouraged car-and-bike sharing programmes. A long section of the Right Bank of the river Seine is now car free. Further 'sweeteners' are also being offered to incite drivers of pre-97 cars to ditch permanently their vehicles: notably up to €400 off the purchase of an electric bicycle or off the subscription to the Autolib and Vélib car and bike sharing services. However, many drivers maintain that this has to be offset against an estimated reduction of €1250 in the value of their vehicles as they will be much harder to sell (if indeed at all possible) once the pollution laws come into effect. An association of car drivers has instigated collective legal proceedings against the Town Hall, and as it was French governments who encouraged the purchase of diesel vehicles for many years in the first place, in the interest of fairness if you're affected by this then visit the website remboursemabagnole.com.

Air pollution is becoming big business – hardly surprising, as what is undeniably happening is an increase in public awareness as to the dangers of pollution and resultant political willingness to do something about it. The short- and long-term health impacts are now well established: atherosclerosis, where arteries gradually become blocked up by plaques causing them to harden and narrow; effects on the viscosity of blood and increased blood pressure. Basically, it's not just the lungs that suffer, and

studies are showing that atmospheric pollution is heavily affecting the heart and the entire cardiovascular system as well, not to mention the nefarious effects on asthmatics of every age.

Technology is trying to find answers. Volkswagen emissions scandal aside, modern diesel engines are more energy-efficient and are equipped with Diesel Particulate Filters which, although far from perfect, have considerably reduced the amount of black soot belched by older models. While European governments try to control and restrain air pollution, a Dutch company has been developing a technology that could if not completely remove pollution from cities, at least reduce it to less harmful levels. They've created a device called 'The Smog-free Tower', the world's largest air-purifier, the idea being that this would act as a giant vacuum cleaner, sucking up to 30,000 cubic metres of air per hour, acting as a filter and removing harmful particles before pumping the air back into the street 75% cleaner than it was. The Tower has impressive green credentials, running on wind-power and consuming no more energy than a standard electric kettle. Designers from Studio Roosegaarde in Rotterdam are raising money to make this project a reality, and hope to bring together governments, NGOs, the clean tech industry and of course ordinary citizens as well.

Naturally, one could argue that we should remove the cause rather than the effect, and no one technology, plan or tactic can be as completely effective as eliminating the root causes of air pollution. But let's face it, on a global scale that's just not going to happen for many decades. Nonetheless, as we gradually make the transition from fossil fuels to cleaner forms of energy, 'The Smog-free Tower' could be an invaluable assistant, at least in the short- to mid-term. There will be a pilot air-filter project in Eindhoven, and a team was recently in negotiations for a similar project in Paris.