

To the State Secretary for Infrastructure and Water Management

Date: January 23<sup>th</sup>, 2018    Your ref: lenM/BSK-2016/88710    E-mail: Marjon.Drijver@gr.nl  
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Subject: Presentation of the advisory report on *Health benefits through cleaner air*

Dear State Secretary,

In response to the request for advice of 18 May 2016 from your predecessor, I am presenting you with the advisory report on Health benefits through cleaner air. It has been written by the Air Quality Committee of the Health Council of the Netherlands. A draft of the advisory report was evaluated by the Standing Committee on Public Health. The advisory report and the relevant background documents (Health effects of air pollution and Air pollution in the Netherlands) can be downloaded via the website of the Health Council.

Air quality in the Netherlands has improved considerably in recent decades, and the European standards are being met almost everywhere. Nevertheless, exposure to air pollution still makes a significant contribution to diseases and premature death; exposure to particulate matter alone is responsible for approximately 4% of the burden of disease in the Netherlands. After smoking (13%), air pollution is therefore one of the most important risk factors, being of the same order of magnitude as obesity (5%) and too little physical activity (3-4%).

Your aim is to give public health a more central place within the framework of air quality policy and you would like to use this advisory report as a basis for realising this via further improvements to air quality. In that regard, the Committee recommends aiming to achieve concentrations that are lower than the air quality guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO). Even at concentrations below the guidelines recommended by the WHO, adverse health effects are still to be expected.

The Committee recommends further reducing the concentrations of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide originating from road traffic as well as the emissions of ammonia from livestock farming. These generic source-based measures will reduce the blanket of air pollution above the Netherlands and provide health benefits for the entire Dutch population. Reducing the concentrations of particulate matter contributes the most to these health benefits, as each reduction of 5 micrograms/m<sup>3</sup> in the air would add about three months to the average life expectancy of the population. Additional health benefits can be realised by targeting local sources of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide and by taking additional measures to protect high-risk groups. The amount of health benefits that is achieved in practice depends, among other things, on how strictly compliance with the regulations can be enforced.

I support the Committee's analysis and recommendations.

Best regards,  
(signed)

prof. dr. W.A. van Gool,  
President