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TER DOCUMENTIE

Brussels, December 1976

NEW GROUND BROKEN ON AIR POLLUTION FROM
MOTOR VEHICLES

The Commission has just taken another step forward in the control of air pollution from motor vehicles, with the adoption of a directive setting limits on the quantities of Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) permitted in motor vehicle exhaust (1). The directive adapts to technical progress earlier Council directives limiting emissions of carbon monoxide and unburnt hydrocarbons (2).

Adaptation to technical progress

As in the case of all directives harmonising national legislations for the purpose of eliminating technical barriers to trade, the Commission's departments keep constant contact with all informed and interested circles so as to see how existing directives are applied, what their effects are, and what new problem areas are emerging which will require Community attention so as to ensure unrestricted movement of goods and proper public health and environmental protection.

In this instance, contact with national type-approval authorities administering the directives on carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons showed the Commission's departments that while the emission of those two toxic substances had decreased after introduction of the directives, the inherent combustion characteristics of conventional engines are such that this decrease has led in general to an increase in NO_x emissions.

Freeze present global emission levels

A declaration of the Council of November 1973 on the Communities' Environment Action programme provided that the 1970 directive be extended to other pollutants. A 1974 study among all major European manufacturers revealed that motor technology had advanced to the point that limits could now be set on NO_x emissions. The report on the "Air pollution" session of the Motor Vehicle Symposium organised by the Commission in December 1975 recommended that, as a priority, normative limits for nitrogen oxides should now be included in the provisions of directive 70/220/EEC so as to "freeze present global emission levels".

The Commission's departments therefore, empowered under the 1970 directive to adopt further directives adapting that directive in the light of technical progress, set up the necessary working groups and arrived at agreed NO_x limits. These limits are now added to the limits for carbon monoxide and unburnt hydrocarbons set out in the

(1) C (76) 1769

(2) 70/220/EEC: OJ no L 76 of 6 April 1970, p.1 and 74/290/EEC: OJ no L 159 of 15 June 1974, p. 61. See Note P-17, April 1970 and Note IP (76) 39, March 1974.

1970 directive, and as from 1st October 1977, EEC type approval cannot be given for motor vehicles which emit higher quantities of NO_x.

A first step

The leading idea behind the Commission's decision is that it is advisable to establish the basis for future coordinated reductions of the three main pollutants emitted by motor vehicles. Hence, this amendment of the 1970 directive is to be considered as the first step on the way towards the coherent reduction of these pollutants which will be followed as soon as all the necessary elements have been compiled, including the results of the work already begun in the UN's Economic Commission for Europe at Geneva.