

The EU's Environment Commissioner Karmenu Vella met with environment ministers from nine member states on Tuesday today to discuss their countries' failure to meet Brussels' air quality standards.

Ministers from Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the UK, Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia met with Vella where he said the ministers expressed an understanding that immediate action must be taken but warned that the Commission would severely penalise members that breached EU rules on pollutants such as nitrogen oxide and particulate matter.

Vella said more than 400,000 people die prematurely every year in Europe as a result of air pollution and previous air quality standards set more than a decade ago are still violated by 23 of the 28 EU member states.

The primary concern of the Commission is to protect EU citizen but said a "sense of urgency" is not always present when it comes to air quality, according to Vella.

"I urge all member states to address this life-threatening problem, and with the type of urgency that it deserves," said Vella. "In our exchange, there were some positive suggestions, but I have to say that at first sight, these were not substantial enough to change the bigger picture," he said, adding members had until next week to improve on their proposals."

In order to meet the 2020 climate change deadline, Vella said EU members need to make improving air quality standards a priority within their respective governments.

"There are no new deadlines, we are not delaying (anything) and we are not postponing the process," said Vella. "The deadlines have long elapsed and some say we have waited already too long. We can delay no more...I made this very clear to the ministers this morning."

Source: energia.gr