

The Environmental Protection Agency has changed the criteria for assessing air quality these days, so now air that, for example, has been assessed as “polluted” so far, is assessed as “acceptable”, the Regulatory Institute for Renewable Energy and Environment (RERI) and Belgrade Open School announced. Now air containing over 40 micrograms per cubic meter of PM 2.5 particles is no longer “polluted” but “acceptable”. Likewise, if the air contains 50 micrograms per cubic meter of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), it is now “excellent”, not just “good”. When asked how it is possible for these changes to occur, Rajic said that it has long been acceptable for those who make decisions for Serbian citizens to breathe excessively polluted air for years, and that now “only the factual situation is legally likened. “We don’t know how the criteria were changed either - there is no reasonable explanation for that, at least we haven’t seen it, and there is no basis in the law and any criteria that would explain how this came about,” he claims.

As he says, serious countries do not solve problems in this way, and that can be dangerous for the health of citizens.

“It is problematic that these new measures, and these new limits, as well as the old ones, deviate from those set at the level of the European Environment Agency,” warns Rajic. He reminds that Serbia is in the status of an associate of the European Agency and that it should be followed.

“As far as PM_{2.5} particles are concerned, our values are much more liberal than the European ones,” he explains.

In Serbia, according to the data of the World Health Organization, only from the excessive concentration of PM 2.5 particles, about 3600 people die prematurely. Rajic explains that PM_{2.5} are actually powdery substances, very small particles that, due to their size, stay in the air for a long time, and which are very dangerous when they enter the bloodstream and create health problems.

“They are mostly created by the operation of power plants, heating plants, individual furnaces, then comes heavy industry and traffic - all that is the biggest problem in our country when it comes to pollution,” he says.

A “new-old” report appeared on the agency’s website, which lacks the information that the results of automatic monitoring from the local network of the city of Belgrade have been submitted to the Agency despite several requests. Rajic says that he would also like to know why the Agency hid the information that Belgrade did not submit data on pollution, and explains:

“What we know is that the air in Belgrade has been assessed as excessively polluted in the last five years. A serious fight against this problem would mean adopting an Air Quality Plan

and implementing it.”

City Secretary for Environmental Protection Ivana Vilotijevic stated that the Air Quality Plan, which is valid until the end of 2020, has been fulfilled by 90 percent. Rajic says that her statement is “at least a lump sum” because the plan is written in such a way that its implementation cannot be assessed in percentages. I don’t know how she came to that figure, after all, anyone can go outside and see what the air is like - so either the plan is not well written or there are no clear criteria in it “, he explains. He states that no details are known about the new plan, which has been announced for a long time, except that it refers to the next 10 years.

“RERI is of the opinion that such a serious document deserves a wide discussion in society and the involvement of experts in the drafting, and we still do not know at what stage this plan is, the draft has not been published yet,” says Rajic.

The RERI Institute, together with a group of non-governmental organizations, asked the Government of Serbia, competent ministries, Belgrade and local self-governments to suspend all procedures of public insight into planning acts and all procedures of environmental impact assessment due to the abolition of the state of emergency. Rajic says that it is important to enable interested citizens and organizations to participate in the development of plans, because these are very important documents and it is a very important moment for their adoption.

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