

The Great Smog

The Great Smog hit London on 4 December 1952 and lasted until March 1953. This disaster caused death of thousands of people, and was the driving force of changes in environmental approach.

At the beginning of December 1952, a thick fog covered London. The smog was so thick that it sometimes prevented traffic. It entered buildings and thus concerts and film projections were being cancelled, because spectators couldn't see till the stage or the cinema screen.

Since London had been accustomed to occurrences of fog, there was initially no panic. After some time, however, medical services started comparing the numbers of deaths with previous years. It was found that some 4,000 people had died due to the smog; these were mostly very young or very old people with respiratory problems. Further 8,000 Londoners then died by the end of the smog period.

These shocking figures led to a rethinking of air pollution.

Ostrava - 8 December, 2010

I have just come back from my surgery. Visibility is very poor. All around, as far as you are able to see, spreads a thick grey-to-black fog. Fog lights don't seem able to cope. Car windscreens are covered with a plasticine that wipers refuse to wipe off. Eyes are burning, conjunctiva are getting red, bronchis are aching, one cannot breathe. I remember a lot in this city with respect to air pollution. But this is something new even for me. A very unpleasant 'new'.

As a doctor, I am gripped by anxiety as to what will happen next. Anxiety about the health of local people, and anger at those who have as an obligation to protect it. An obligation given by the functions that they hold.

It makes me sad. I have been fighting for a cleanup of this city and for the right of its citizens to live in health for more than 10 years now. I have been called a crook, a liar, a thief as well as crazy. And together with me all those who dared to give me a helping hand - most notably Dr. Radim Sram from the Institute of Experimental Medicine of the Academy of Sciences and his team.

Even so, we are progressing, step by step, carrying out scientific research and studies, collecting evidence, warning, alarming. At a time when it still has some sense for the health of local people. Every subsequent analysis proves that we are right. And that we have been right since the very beginning. I am looking out of the window and thinking whether we could experience this winter ourselves what happened to London fifty years ago. Whether we here are about to undergo a similarly harsh test. And whether it is necessary to only start looking for a solution once thousands of innocent people die.

I don't know... There are questions that only life itself will give answers to.

Wishing you clean air in your lungs. Eva Schallerova, MD