

Faith Groups & Air Pollution



#brumbreathes

Air pollution is a growing problem in **Birmingham**. It presents a threat to the health of all of our city's inhabitants. This is an introduction to the problem of poor air quality. We explore how each faith responds to this problem, and provide some ideas about what you and your faith community can do to reduce air pollution in Birmingham.



What is Air Pollution?

Any substance in the air which causes harm to people, animals, and the environment is a type of air pollutant. In Birmingham, the two main substances are Nitrogen Oxides (types of gas) and Particulate Matter (tiny particles of dust or liquid).

Air pollution is responsible for increased risk of strokes and coronary disease, low birthweight, reduced lung development, and increased cases of asthma.

Believers of all faiths recognise the importance of protecting the natural world and its inhabitants. Transport accounts for around 80% of air pollution in Birmingham. If we choose to travel by car we will damage our planet and harm the health of those who live on it. By changing our travel habits so that we are less dependent on our cars, we will improve the quality of the air we all breathe.



Buddhism

"The Dalai Lama says our planet is our house, and we must keep it in order and take care of it if we are genuinely concerned about happiness for ourselves, our children, our friends, and other sentient beings who share this great house with us"

John Beard, Birmingham Buddhist community.

Buddhism talks of balance and the interconnectedness of all things in the universe. The environmental crisis stems from a loss of understanding of the interconnected causality between all beings and the Earth. Individual lives are inextricably interwoven with the natural world and understanding the consequences of our actions is the start to protecting the planet. Respect for the environment is seen as a moral principle and ignorance of these issues isn't acceptable. We must educate ourselves about the causes and effects of air pollution and talk to those around us about the problem. By doing so, we ensure that people have the knowledge and information they need to act to protect the planet.

Christianity

"Christians need to join all people of good will in changing direction and taking care of our common home. Together we can and must"

Revd John Nightingale, Birmingham Anglican Climate Action.

Christianity takes humans to be stewards of God's Creation. As such, it is our duty to look after His gift to us. Air pollution also places responsibility upon us to care for those more vulnerable than ourselves. Just as climate change disproportionately affects those in the poorest communities, so too it is the poorest parts of the city which are most heavily impacted by air pollution. We have a responsibility to all members of society, and all aspects of God's creation, to protect our common home. This includes ensuring the health and wellbeing of all people and creatures by providing them with clean air to breathe.

Hinduism

"The foundation of Hindu faith is known as DHARMA, meaning 'living in harmony with nature and the force that sustains the world.' We are to respect all things in nature we are part of and which we depend on"

Ram Aithal - Trustee & Faith guide.
Balaji temple, Tividale.

The natural world is interconnected with the deities of Hinduism. It is interwoven with living beings and as the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change states "We cannot destroy nature without destroying ourselves. Man is integrally linked to the whole of Creation".¹ Air pollution affects all people within society: it is detrimental to health, leading to respiratory problems and reduced life-expectancy. It is also harmful to animals, and dissolves in water, entering rivers and streams and causing damage to wildlife. Acting to improve the air we breathe is an action Hindus can take to protect our planet and 'respect all things in nature'.

Judaism

"Judaism teaches that human beings have been appointed as Guardians of the Earth, commanded in the book of Genesis 'to work it and to watch over it'"

Rabbi Margaret Jacobi,
Birmingham Progressive Synagogue.

As Guardians of the Earth, we have a responsibility to defend the environment and all creatures who inhabit it. Air pollution has a detrimental effect on all members of society; most of all those in the poorest communities. To ignore this fact is to display a profound lack of care for the world which God has created. We must make wiser choices in order to improve air quality for all of us. Good actions are expressions of our faith: by acting in a way which preserves God's Creation and shows respect for its inhabitants we express our commitment to God.

Islam

"As Muslims, we believe that our relationship with God should go beyond the regular formalities of worship and should also include love and stewardship of the blessings that have been provided to us."

Kamran Shezad – Bahu Trust.

Muslims must care for Allah's Creation, and all people and things within it. Air pollution poses a significant harm to other people, as well as animals and all other parts of the environment. Actions are a demonstration of faith and service to Allah, we must make better choices about how we travel, to protect the environment, all beings within creation and start to restore balance. By improving the air that we breathe, we start to restore the balance which human action has transgressed, and show respect for Allah.

Sikhism

"Everything we see around us, every human, plant and insect living on this planet. Every planet in our galaxy and every galaxy in this universe, this is all God".

Prubhijot Singh - Eco Sikh.

Sikhs can perform Seva (the practice of selfless service) by reducing our carbon footprints, respecting the environment and everything in it. Air pollution causes huge problems for the health of people in our city, and significantly harms animals and plants as well. To live in harmony with all creation, we must act to reduce air pollution; making more considered choices about how we travel.

¹ <http://www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org/english>

What Can We Do?

Walk, Cycle, Use Public Transport! A quarter of all car journeys made in Birmingham are under 1 mile! If you are travelling a short distance, leave the car at home and walk, cycle, or take the bus. If you have to use your car, share the journey with someone else. So if you're going to your place of worship offer to take someone else who would otherwise drive.

Talk About It! Let other members of your community know about air pollution in Birmingham, and help them to make their journeys more sustainable. You could do this by holding monthly events where you inspire your congregation to leave their cars at home and walk or cycle. Encourage people to car-share: maybe introduce a buddy-system so that people travelling from the same area can travel together.

If everyone who drove did this, then this would halve the amount of air pollution emitted on journeys to worship.

Protect Yourself! Plan your journeys so that you walk on quieter streets and through parks. By avoiding busy roads, you will breathe cleaner air. You're also likely to be exposed to less pollution as a pedestrian or cyclist than you would be in a car. Vehicles trap pollutants, meaning that car users are often exposed to worse air quality than pedestrians and cyclists. By walking or cycling along routes with less traffic, and encouraging other people to do the same, this will reduce the number of people exposed to air pollution.



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Faiths for a Low Carbon Future



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