

EU Commission warns members it will get tough on pollution



BRUSSELS (Reuters) – The European Commission said on Tuesday it would get tough on air quality and penalize members that breached EU rules on pollutants such as nitrogen oxide and particulate matter.

The Commission estimates that 400,000 people die every year as the result of airborne pollution, and targets introduced for 2005 and 2010 are still being exceeded in 23 of 28 EU countries.

After a meeting with the environment ministers of nine countries which face legal action because of air quality problems, including the bloc's largest economies Germany and France, EU Environment Commissioner Karmenu Vella said his

patience was running thin.

“The deadlines for meeting the legal obligations have long elapsed, and some say we have waited already too long, but we can delay no more, and I have made this very clear to ministers this morning,” Vella told a news conference.

He added that while countries had made some suggestions during the meeting, air quality standards would still be breached well beyond 2020 unless new measures were taken.

“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,” Vella said, adding members had until next week to improve on their proposals.

The EU Commission can take countries to Europe’s top court if they breach EU law. Poland as well as Bulgaria have already faced legal action over air quality issues.