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Sufferers need car fuel pollution cut, Govt told

by Wayne Thompson

The Auckland Regional Council wants to cut vehicle pollution to help asthmatics because the city has one of the highest rates of the disease in the world.

Asthmatics are susceptible to nitrogen dioxide in vehicle fuel, says the council's air quality manager, Kevin Mahon.

He says monitoring has shown a widespread and serious nitrogen dioxide problem.

Mr Mahon told the council's environmental management committee that a European study blamed air pollution for 800,000 episodes of asthma and bronchitis each year in Austria, France and Switzerland.

This study, published in the *Lancet*, said 40,000, or 6 per cent, of deaths were because of air pollution.

A New Zealand study had found 253 people a year died prematurely as a result of vehicle emissions in Auck-

ASTHMA



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land. But many more people suffered health effects such as asthma attacks and bronchitis, said Mr Mahon.

New Zealand studies on a relationship between asthma attacks and air quality were about two to three years away.

The committee decided to call on the Government to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels in fuel.

Dr Gavin Fisher, of the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, who co-authored a health effects report to the Ministry of Transport, said there was no proof that asthma was caused by air pol-

lution. But he said asthmatics were affected by air pollution, sometimes badly.

"We know that on days of high nitrogen dioxide levels asthmatics can have problems when outside in New Zealand but we have no numbers on that yet."

The report to the ministry in January said groups susceptible to nitrogen dioxide included young children, asthmatics and those with chronic bronchitis.

Nitrogen dioxide appeared to exert its effects directly on the lung, leading to an inflammatory reaction on the surfaces of the lung.

Motor vehicles are the main source of nitrogen oxides in urban areas.

Asthmatics are particularly susceptible to sulphur oxides.

The report said these had been measured at increasing levels in Auckland because of the rising number of diesel vehicles.