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Health experts react to Commission reversal on preventative health measures

Combustion engine phase out scrapped

From a health perspective, the European Respiratory Society (ERS) holds, that the phase-out of internal combustion engines represents one of the EU's most effective preventive measures. Weakening it risks reversing progress on air quality, climate resilience, and health equity, and runs counter to the EU's commitments to protect public health and reduce avoidable disease through the Beating Cancer Plan and it seriously undermines the Safe Hearts – Cardiovascular plan launched just today (16 December, 2025).

Commenting on the development, Chair of the ERS Advocacy Council Prof. Barbara Hoffmann said:

“Road transport remains a major source of harmful air pollutants, including nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter, which are strongly linked to respiratory and cardiovascular disease, premature mortality, and increased healthcare burden.

“Delaying the transition away from combustion engines will slow progress in reducing air pollution, prolonging exposure for millions of Europeans — particularly children and those living with chronic respiratory and cardiovascular conditions. There is a heightened risk of increasing avoidable hospitalisations, exacerbating health inequalities, and undermining preventive health efforts.

“The decision also has longer-term implications for climate-related health risks. Transport is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and weakening the ban will delay decarbonisation, increasing exposure to heatwaves, extreme weather, and pollution episodes that further threaten population health and strain health systems.”