The Great London Smog of 1952

When severe cold weather hit London in December 1952, Londoners did what they usually did in such a situation – they burned more coal to heat their homes. However, on December 5th, a blanket of dense fog descended on the city and stayed for five days. The **black smoke** from the coal burning in people's homes and the **industrial smoke** from all London's factories combined with the **fog** (which was prevented from escaping by an anticyclone) to create a dense layer of "**smog**" ("smoke"+"fog").

Londoners, who were used to foggy weather, were not shocked to find themselves surrounded by the dense smog. Although the smog did not create panic, it paralyzed the city for five days – from December 5th to December 9th.

During these five days, visibility in London was extremely difficult. In some places, visibility was only about 1 meter, so that you couldn't see your own feet. Transportation across the city completely stopped and many people didn't go outside for fear of getting lost. In theatres and cinemas, the smog entered through the doors and the audiences couldn't see the stages or screens. Consequently all the theatres and cinemas were closed.

When the smog dissipated on December 9th, the real lethality of the situation was discovered. During the five days, over 4,000 people died in the city. In the following weeks, approximately 8,000 more died from the effects of the smog. The event became known as "**The Great London Smog of 1952**". Most of those who died were old people or people who had pre-existing respiratory problems.

The death toll from the Great London Smog of 1952 was truly shocking. Pollution, which many people had thought was just a normal part of city life, had been responsible for the deaths of around 12,000 people. The government realized that something had to change.

It was the black smoke that had caused the most damage. So, in 1956 and 1968, the government passed two "**Clean Air Acts**", which began the process of eliminating coal as a fuel for heating homes and factories. Today, English homes use gas or electricity for heating.

Suggested videos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xajjmbJrfEM (3 mins)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmrjwAkMveE (11 mins)