

News

The cold snap sends workers scurrying back to warm offices

By Gareth Corfield

PLUNGING winter temperatures are sending remote workers hurrying back to warm offices as cash-strapped staff count their pennies.

Research from employment website CV-Library showed that a fifth of 17,000 professionals said they had changed their working patterns and returned to the office as a result of recent freezing weather. Of those, more than 40 per cent said that they had gone to the office "purely to save on heating bills".

Lee Biggins, CV-Library's founder and CEO, said: "Britain's greatest obsession is often reported to be the weather but its impact on the economy is a serious topic."

"The knock-on impacts of severe weather aren't just limited to reduced consumer spending and supply and distribution issues."

'Britain's greatest obsession is often reported to be the weather but its impact on the economy is serious'

About half of those polled by the company said recent cold weather had not affected their working pattern, while 10 per cent said that they would have liked to go back to the office but could not because of unreliable public transport.

Most of Britain's rail network was hit by strikes last month and the early part of this month, with rail unions rejecting pay rises last week and announcing fresh strikes for February.

Job adverts for fully remote posts declined for the seventh straight month in November, according to data from LinkedIn, with just one in 10 vacancies now offering full remote working.

Josh Graff, LinkedIn's managing director for Europe, told *The Telegraph* last month: "Leaders are tightening their grip as they prepare for continued uncertainty in 2023, and that's translating into companies pulling back on remote work."



Taking the plunge A swimmer breaks ice covering the Serpentine lake in Hyde Park yesterday. London mayor Sadiq Khan issued an air pollution warning as freezing fog trapped emissions in the atmosphere. A level three cold weather alert is in place for England, with an increased risk of accidents. *Weather: Page 24*

'No evidence that 60mph limit cuts pollution'

Call to end trials of lower speeds on motorways as proof of reduced emissions has failed to emerge

By Sarah Knapton, Martin Evans and Will Hazel

SPEED limits that force motorists to drive at less than 60mph should end, campaigners have said, after it emerged the trials have lasted twice as long as originally proposed without producing evidence that they reduce emissions.

Drivers on stretches of the M1, the M6, the M5 and the M602, have been

limited to the top speed to determine whether lower speed limits would benefit the environment.

But the reduced speed limits, which were only due to last between 12 and 15 months, have been operating for more than two years, despite a lack of evidence that they are effective.

And some campaigners have suggested that congestion caused by the lower limit actually increases pollution.

Motoring groups and a former roads minister are among those calling on National Highways to produce data from the trials or end them. Modelling had suggested the lower limit would significantly reduce nitrogen dioxide concentrations in the affected zones and that this

would help areas near Rotherham in South Yorkshire, Witton in Birmingham, Eccles in Greater Manchester and Oldbury in the West Midlands meet pollution targets sooner than expected. But it has been claimed that the modelling did not consider particle pollution produced by braking.

The policy also penalises electric vehicles that produce no exhaust emissions and newer, less polluting cars.

More than two years since the trials began, no data has been published to show air quality has improved. But the trials have caused frustration for drivers who have also endured delays due to years of smart motorway upgrades.

Sir John Hayes, a former roads minis-

'They've got to either come up with facts or concede that the scheme was not designed for its purpose'

ter, said National Highways should show that the trial was working or reinstate the national speed limit.

He added: "Air pollution is a real concern but the relationship between speed of traffic and pollution is complex. When you have congested traffic, emissions grow. It's hard to legitimise the argument that the difference between 60 and 70 is significant in terms of emissions, but I'd be happy to

look at the facts. They've got to either come up with the facts or concede that the scheme was not designed for its purpose."

Iain Stewart, the Conservative chairman of the Transport Select Committee, said: "I've got a general concern about having things that evolve by a creeping change without it being evidence-based. I would certainly want to quiz them on what data that they've established thus far has shown and whether that gives a justification for these speed restrictions to be made permanent."

Claire Armstrong, of Safe Speed, a campaign group, said the scheme may have made pollution worse.

She said: "If you slow traffic, you risk

creating congestion and the more congestion the more pollution."

A spokesman for National Highways said: "As part of this process we are taking a series of actions, such as lowering speed limits on some roads. Robust findings informed our decision and these 60mph limits will remain in place until the air quality [on them] has met legal limits and will continue to do so when the measure is removed. Given the complexity and amount of data needed, this requires appropriate time to complete all the stages of the analysis process."

"National Highways is looking to produce initial reports on the performance of the real-world 60mph speed limits in spring 2023."

Very few vans on sale meet Khan's Ulez expansion rules

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

THE expansion of Sadiq Khan's Ultra-low Emission Zone (Ulez) in London will leave thousands of drivers facing daily fines because of a lack of compliant vans for sale, according to analysis.

The zone will be expanded to cover the whole of the capital from Aug 29 to boost air quality, with a £12.50 daily fee for vehicles not meeting minimum standards. A report commissioned by Transport for London estimated that 30,000 non-compliant vans use the Ulez expansion area each day.

But figures from Auto Trader, which says it is used by around 80 per cent of vehicle retailers, show there are only 5,181 vans for sale in London and the South East on its online marketplace.

Its total for the whole of the UK is 23,803. To avoid the Ulez fee, diesel vehicles, which make up the majority of vans, must be Euro 6 standard, which covers those registered from 2016.

A tradesman in London working in an older van every working day will rack up more than £3,100 a year in charges.

Drivers who fail to pay face a £160 penalty each day, which is halved if paid within a fortnight. The average price of a diesel van that meets the emissions standards is £23,970 on Auto Trader.

That is £6,500 more than for a non-compliant van. An Auto Trader spokes-

man said "This will be a real worry for thousands of van drivers already struggling to cope with high inflation."

"The number of Ulez-compliant vans for sale in London and the South East is just a fraction of the estimated 30,000 vans affected, leaving the majority facing the prospect of paying thousands of pounds extra to get to work."

The scheme is currently limited to



Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, plans to extend the Ultra-low Emission Zone (Ulez) to cover the whole of the capital

the area within the North and South Circular roads.

A spokesman for Mr Khan, London's mayor, said: "The mayor has been clear that the decision to expand the Ultra Low Emission Zone London-wide was one of the hardest he's had to make, but with around 4,000 Londoners still dying from toxic air it was a necessary one."

Last week at Prime Minister's Questions, Rishi Sunak urged the mayor to "properly reconsider" Ulez expansion and "listen to the public" after thousands of people voiced their opposition through responses to a consultation.



Lakeside Christian Furr's painting of the Serpentine hangs in the newly renovated Dorchester hotel. He was the youngest artist, aged 28, to officially paint the late Queen.

Powering electric cars can now cost more than petrol

By Gareth Corfield

THE cost of charging an electric car has become more expensive than filling a petrol tank for some drivers following the introduction of peak rates at charge points.

Previous analysis by motoring organisations has shown the cost of charging electric vehicles soared in recent months, driven by rising energy prices partly triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February.

Rapid charge points used by motorists topping up on long drives are now nearly £10 more expensive than filling up a car with petrol, the RAC revealed last week.

But research from the AA published today finds that recharging an electric car even when using a slow public charger can be more expensive, per mile driven afterwards, than refuelling a comparable petrol car if done during a peak period.

Jack Cousens, the AA's head of roads policy and recharging, said: "While pump prices are falling, electricity prices are going in the other direction, but we are hopeful prices could tail off later this year."

News that electric cars could be more expensive to run than petrol or diesel alternatives will strike a blow at the Government's target of reaching net

zero carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2050.

AA analysts compared a 1.2L petrol Vauxhall Corsa with the e-Corsa, the manufacturer's electrically-powered alternative. Topping up the e-Corsa's charge by 80 per cent on a slow charger at peak times results in a cost of 16.18p per mile.

The AA said: "A continued fall in the

16.18p

Cost per mile of powering an electric car compared to 14.45p per mile for the petrol equivalent, according to the AA

price of petrol now places the running costs of a petrol Corsa at around 14.45 pence per mile, meaning that a petrol combustion engine vehicle is cheaper to run per mile than an EV."

The figures come after some public electric charger providers began to split their charging tariffs into peak and off-peak periods, reflecting tight UK electricity supplies during the cold weather.

Mr Cousens added: "The price gap between the two is staggering – so, much like refuelling a petrol or diesel car, drivers should check the rates they could be paying before plugging in."

Northern Ireland 'allowed' illegal dumping

By George Styllis

COUNCILS in Northern Ireland allowed criminals to illegally dump household recycling near a supply of drinking water, according to a BBC investigation.

An estimated one million tonnes of waste, some of it highly toxic, was dumped at the Moboy site in Derry. The site waste dump covered 46 hectares and meets the protected River Faughan.

The waste licence for the site was revoked by the Environment Agency in 2013 over activity that saw about a

million tonnes of waste illegally disposed there. At the time, the then-environment minister Alex Attwood described Moboy as one of the largest illegal dumps ever found in Europe.

A new 10-part BBC Radio 4 series, *Buried*, will examine how the activity allegedly involved councils from across Northern Ireland paying criminals to dump waste families' recycling over a number of years in a special area of conservation.

Until recently journalists were unable to report on the case due to ongoing court proceedings over a period of 10

years. But following two convictions last year, those restrictions have been lifted. A recently uncovered memo seen by the BBC alleges that key civil servants and officials in the Northern Ireland government knew that they had likely broken the law.

Last year, three of five defendants pleaded guilty to a range of waste offences in relation to dumping, with two men convicted in November.

Lucy Taylor, who co-presents the BBC series, said: "Everything about this crime has shocked us, from its scale to the years of silence around it."

Waitrose makes tea bags home compostable

By Catherine Lough

WAITROSE is the first UK supermarket to have its own-brand tea bags certified as home compostable.

It claims this could stop 4.5 million going to landfill or incineration in the first year, the equivalent of 12.2 tons.

The tags on the bags have been changed to have less ink so that the tea bags can break down more effectively. Christina Capellaro, packaging development manager, said: "By securing accreditation for products such as our Duchy home compostable tea bags,

we're reassuring our customers that by making these little changes to their shopping habits they can reduce their impact on the environment."

Waitrose says it is "on track to making all own-label packaging widely recycled, reusable or home compostable by the end of 2023".

The supermarket launched its own line of coffee pods in 2021 which can be composted at home, with the pods made from materials such as sunflower seed bark and sugar derived from corn. The lids are made from cellulose.

And in 2019, the company launched

what it said was the world's first compostable ready-meal packaging. It worked with suppliers to create packaging that could be heated in the oven and microwave but was cool to the touch after cooking, with the fibre-based packaging recyclable and saving 50 per cent on CO2 emissions.

Last year, the supermarket also scrapped "best before" dates on certain foods, so that customers could "use their own judgment to decide whether a product is good to eat or not, which in turn, will increase its chances of being eaten and not becoming waste".