



The Hague's not vague. Ads by high carbon advertisers are to be illegal.

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In early September 2024, The Hague became the first city in the world to impose a legal ban on outdoor ads for high-carbon advertisers in sectors such as fossil fuels, aviation and cruise ships. This will affect ads on billboards and bus shelters and is due to come into force from the start of 2025.

Although some other cities, such as Edinburgh, have implemented similar measures on a voluntary basis through the policies used by the contractors who manage the city's own media portfolio, this is the first time that such a ban has been enacted by means of a law. The Hague has certainly lived up to its definite article. No vague half-measures in The Hague. And this may soon extend to their neighbouring city, Amsterdam, also in ***The*** Netherlands. Fortunately, there are no cities in the UK whose name is presaged with a definite article.

Campaigners against advertising in general and in high-carbon sectors in particular are delighted by this development. They'll now be ramping up their efforts to implement similar legal bans in the UK.

They draw inspiration from the speech in June this year by António Guterres, the secretary general of the United Nations, in which he said *"Many governments restrict or prohibit advertising for products that harm human health, like tobacco. I urge every country to ban advertising from fossil-fuel companies. And I urge news media and tech companies to stop taking fossil-fuel advertising."* Mr Guterres appears to have overlooked the fact that these days, most if not all advertising by 'fossil-fuel companies' is to promote their various alternative sources of energy, such as wind and solar, not their traditional fossil-fuel products. In the UK, at least, it's a long time since Esso urged anyone to put a tiger in their tank.

However, the current targets go wider than traditional fossil-fuel companies, and now captures other high-carbon sectors, such as airlines and airports, cruise ships, and cars other than electric or hydrogen powered vehicles. The banks that finance fossil fuel production are also a target for campaigners, such as HSBC.

Other cities have taken similar steps through council motions. One example is Sheffield, The City of Steel, prior to the demise of both coal mining and steel production in South Yorkshire. And its not just high carbon advertising that campaigners want to ban, they have similar ambitions for HFSS food advertising. Liverpool City Council also announced in early September that it is considering such a ban.

There's a confluence between the interests of different campaign groups who pursue agendas covering the environment, obesity and public health, animal welfare and consumerism. All these groups are now emboldened to pursue various city bans on outdoor advertising bans across a wide range of sectors. Whether cash-strapped cities can live without the revenue from outdoor advertising is another matter, to say nothing of whether such bans are either effective or

proportionate in a democracy, particularly given that advertising is already heavily regulated. And it is also far from clear whether posturing by politicians in local councils from The Hague to Edinburgh, and to international organisations like United Nations, will make any difference to global warming. But hey, so long as they get re-elected, that's the main thing, right?

“I call on [[public relations and media companies]] to stop acting as enablers to planetary destruction. Stop taking on new fossil-fuel clients, from today, and set out plans to drop your existing ones. Fossil fuels are not only poisoning our planet – they’re toxic for your brand.” António Guterres

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