Author's response to reviews

Title: Lung cancer mortality in towns near paper, pulp and board industries in Spain

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Please find attached to this letter a revised version of the manuscript. In this version we incorporate all the suggestions made by the reviewer. In the following paragraphs we will address the comments made by the referee.

Sincerely,

Gonzalo López-Abente
Minor Essential Revisions

Two comments made in the initial review remain valid, however. One stated that “surprisingly, no reference is made to traffic-related emissions as a possible contributor to the risk of lung cancer in urban areas.” Given the mounting evidence of the association between lung cancer incidence and exposure to traffic emissions, that the paper, in this revised version, not even alludes to this area of research is indeed surprising.

A new paragraph about traffic-related emissions is now included in discussion section.

The second relates to the ascription of the risk of lung cancer to SO2. The least the authors should do is to state that SO2 is, in the paper and board industries, a fair indicator of general airborne emissions, rather than the suspected carcinogenic agent. As it is now written in the paper, this ascription – should the statistical association between lung cancer and the proximity of the two plants be causal - is clearly an over interpretation of the findings. It is inappropriate to refer to SO2 as «a compound with one of the highest emissions” to back this idea. Comparative mass emissions are not a relevant indicator of relative hazardous potency (otherwise, why bother about dioxins, for example?).

Taking into account this suggestions the discussion paragraph about SO2 as carcinogen was suppressed. We have adopted the reviewer idea about SO2 as emissions indicator, changing some parts of the paragraph about emissions of paper industries.

Discretionary Revisions

Page 8 (end of 3rd §): “Another possible idea about the gender differences in lung cancer could be that pollutants in ambient air in connection with smoking could be the responsible. » The meaning of this sentence is unclear.

OK. This sentence was rewritten and a new reference included.