

# INDIA DELAYS ANTI-POLLUTION RULES FOR COAL POWER PLANTS AGAIN

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Pollution - Air, Water, Soil & E-waste

Coal-fired plants located close to populated cities, including capital New Delhi, will now have to meet the standards by December 2022, a seven-year extension from the original plan to cap toxic emissions

India's environment ministry delayed anti-pollution guidelines for coal-fired power plants further, extending the compliance deadline by as long as two years.

Plants located close to populated cities, including capital New Delhi, will now have to meet the standards by December 2022, a seven-year extension from the original plan to cap toxic emissions, including particulate matter, sulfur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, according to a March 31 notification.

Units close to critically-polluted areas have until end-2023 to comply, while those located in less polluted smaller towns can wait on retrofits until the end of 2024. Plants approaching closure have been exempt from the exercise, according to the notification.

Most Indian coal-fired generators have resisted installing the retrofits, citing financial stress and lack of clarity on recovery of their investments. They have found support from the power ministry, which successfully pushed for extending the original deadline and later made a case to the environment ministry for sparing plants in areas with good ambient air quality.

The cost of retrofits has added to concerns of owners of coal-fired plants that their electricity prices will become less competitive against renewable power, whose prices have been declining.

"It is very unfortunate that environment ministry sides with the polluters and law offenders time and again to give them extensions and dilutions rather than with the common public who is suffering from severe pollution and health impacts and whose interest the ministry is duty-bound to protect," Sunil Dahiya, a New Delhi-based analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, said in a text message.

Coal, which helps produce about 65% of India's electricity, has been linked to the choking air pollution in its cities, as well as diseases and premature death of thousands of citizens.

The environment ministry introduced the pollution guidelines in 2015, giving the power companies two years to meet the targets. The deadline was later extended in a revised schedule that stretched until 2022, but most plants are expected to miss that too.

In its latest notification, the environment ministry placed a monetary penalty on those who miss the deadlines. Plants will pay as much as 0.2 rupees a kilowatt hour of power they generate, with the amount varying on with their location and the duration of default.

*This story has been published from a wire agency feed without modifications to the text. Only the headline has been changed.*

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