

Dust mitigation plan must for firms

Choking capital: A 2015 study by IIT-Kanpur reported that road dust and burning of biomass and municipal solid waste were the main causes of Delhi's air pollution. R.V. Moorthy

The Environment Ministry has made it mandatory for companies seeking environment clearance to ensure that they put in place a dust mitigation plan.

The requirements, specified in a gazette notification on January 25, say that roads leading to or at construction sites must be paved and black-topped. There could be no soil excavation without adequate dust mitigation measures in place. No loose soil, sand, construction waste could be left uncovered. A water sprinkling system was mandatory, and the measures taken should be prominently displayed at the construction site. Moreover, the grinding and cutting of building materials in open area were prohibited and no uncovered vehicles carrying construction material and waste would be permitted.

The standards were developed by the Central Pollution Control Board as part of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), and will now empower the organisation to fine companies and agencies for not complying with norms.

A study by the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and commissioned by the Delhi government reported, in 2015, that road dust and burning of biomass and municipal solid waste, constituted the lion's share of the city's air pollution.

Road dust, key villain

Road dust contributed 56% of all PM10 pollution, while it was 38% for PM2.5.

Another estimate by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune had different numbers but still ranked dust as the major contributor — 52% — to the city's PM10 load.

Before PM2.5 became the focus of attention — for its role in lodging itself in the lungs and for being a key component of diesel emissions — dust was the key villain for a long time. Dust is a generic term for a vast mix of metals and non-metals — silicon, aluminium, titanium, manganese, copper, barium, antimony, selenium and zinc.

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