

NCR NEEDS A PLAN TO TACKLE SUMMER AIR POLLUTION

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

The air pollution crisis in Delhi and in the National Capital Region (NCR) is now a year-round public health emergency. According to data provided by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi's air quality on Monday was "very poor" (322); Ghaziabad was also "very poor" (384), and Gurugram was "poor" (277). The air quality of Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) has been consistently bad for the last few days: an average of the PM2.5 data across 10 locations in Delhi, where the CPCB and the Delhi Pollution Control Board monitors are located (taken between May 1 and May 12), show that the Air Quality Index (AQI) levels touched 500 (hazardous) several times.

Why is summer pollution so high in Delhi and NCR? First, Delhi has certain inherent disadvantages — geographical and meteorological — unlike, say, a seaside city such as Chennai. However, there is no nationwide source apportionment or inventory study to understand why Chennai does better than Delhi. On Monday, Chennai's AQI was "good" (43). Experts say that the lack of rain in Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Delhi leads to dust accumulation in these parts. Second, the NCR also has a high level of industrial and vehicular pollution. Third, there is the unique problem of post-harvest stubble burning. According to a study (2013-14) done by the Indian Institute of Technology (Kanpur), summer pollution is mainly a result of dust and fly ash.

The situation is going to get worse as the climate becomes more unpredictable and drier. This is the reason why Delhi and NCR need a plan to counter summer pollution. The authorities seem to wake up to the health hazard only during the winter months. Monitoring and acting on the problem is needed through the year. Not executing an action plan to combat pollution in seasons other than winter will cost the region dear.

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