

FALL IN STUBBLE BURNING INCIDENTS IN PUNJAB & HARYANA, SAYS PANEL

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

There is a 70% reduction so far in instances of stubble burning in Punjab and 18% in Haryana from last year, according to a report on Friday by the Commission for Air Quality Management.

Last year in Punjab, there were 4,216 instances of stubble burning from September 15 to October 14. This dropped to 1,286 in the corresponding period this year. There were 487 incidents this year compared with 596 last year, a press statement by the commission claimed.

In eight districts of Uttar Pradesh, there were 22 instances of burning this year compared with 42 last year.

This, however, is a preliminary analysis as harvesting is still under way and the day-to-day variation in the number of fires is extremely high.

Ravinder Khaiwal, who closely tracks pollution trends and its impact on health at PGIMER, Chandigarh, and monitors data from a NASA satellite that can detect thermal radiation, told *The Hindu* that when comparing data till October 15 in Haryana, there's an increase in fires by 24% and till October 13 — a 30% decrease in fires. Similarly, in Punjab, a comparison till October 15 shows a reduction by 5%, whereas till October 13 it was a reduction of 67%. "Because we are far from the peak of harvesting there will be a significant variation every day and we will have to wait for a few weeks to know if there are fewer fires this year than in previous years," he told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Khaiwal added that he was optimistic there would be a decrease in fires this year because of a decrease in the area allotted to paddy sowing this year.

"There are several initiatives taken such as the increased use of happy seeder [harvesting equipment] and the use of bio-decomposers but this will take time for results to show. Also, it is important to underline that meteorological conditions play a significant role in worsening pollution."

The CAQM made a similar observation last week reporting that a 7% decrease in the area allotted to paddy and moving crops away from the popular variety PUSA 44 (that leaves behind more stubble in its wake) along with measures by the governments of Punjab and Haryana were likely to reduce fire count instances.

Over the years it has been observed that fire counts increase when there is too little time between the paddy being ready for harvesting and the right time to sow wheat. This year, excessive moisture in northern India due to an overhanging monsoon and a delay in the markets opening for trading, may further squeeze the time available for farmers to harvest and sow, further forcing them to set their fields alight.

This year the major districts in Punjab that reported instances of burning were Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Patiala and Ludhiana that accounted for 72% of burning events. In Haryana, Kaithal, Karnal and Kurukshetra accounted for 80% of the instances.

Of the total 1,795 sites where burning had been reported, 663 fields had been inspected by

officials and fines, or “environmental compensation” as they are called, were imposed on 252.

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