

Follow EPCA's rules for Delhi: CSE

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On a day when a thick polluted haze enveloped Delhi-NCR, the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) has directed governments to impose all conditions under the severe category of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). This plan is an emergency plan, which cannot become a substitute for long term and decisive action to cut air pollution, said EPCA chairperson, Bhure Lal.

Under this plan, the task force led by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has been monitoring air quality in NCR and also has forecasts for the coming days. A Sudhakar, Member Secretary, CPCB, explained the prevailing weather conditions as follows: "Currently, Delhi and its neighbouring region are seeing almost still conditions at the ground level,

but in the upper atmosphere there are two wind masses - one from Punjab, which is bringing pollutants from crop burning and the other from eastern UP, which is bringing moisture. These are colliding at the higher altitude. This is leading to conditions where there is both moisture and pollution as well as no wind at the ground level." He said that he expects conditions to remain severe over the next two days as per the forecast made available by IMD.

Given this advisory and the prevailing severe conditions, the EPCA has issued the following directions as listed under GRAP for measures to be put in place immediately. These directions are for governments of NCR, including Delhi.

*Closure of all brick kiln, other than those that have been certified to have converted to zig zag. As of date, not a single brick kiln has been verified. All brick kilns in NCR will be shut.

- *Closure of all hot mix plants and stone crushers
- *Immediately intensify public transport service, by ensuring there are more buses on road, which are run with reliable service.
- *Immediately increase frequency of service of Delhi Metro, including deploying more coaches and introduction of lower fares during off peak hours during this severe period.
- *All state pollution control boards to immediately impose fines on all road constructing agencies where there are inadequate dust control measures. Taking into account the provision of C&D rules, which allow for penalty of up to Rs 5 lakh for construction dust mismanagement, EPCA is directing for a fine of Rs 50,000 to be imposed as penalty per day per stretch for inadequate road dust control.
- *Intensification of mechanized road sweeping and sprinkling of water
- *Continuation of the ban on use of generator sets in Delhi, with exceptions only as defined by DPCC for essential services
- *Immediate enhancement of parking fee by 4 times and depositing additional funds in dedicated parking fund with municipalities
- *Immediately stop use of coal and firewood in hotels and eateries. Implement the Hon'ble Supreme Court order on pet coke and furnace oil
- *Intensify traffic management in all hotspots and increase deployment of traffic police to avoid congestion.
- *Intensify the enforcement of non-destined goods traffic into Delhi by physically checking all vehicles and turning them back - also, putting out public announcements of the numbers that are turned back.

The EPCA is also monitoring the situation carefully in coordination with the CPCB task force. Given the prevailing conditions and the concern about the possible deterioration in weather conditions, it is possible that severe plus or emergency conditions

would need to be imposed in the coming days. EPCA is, therefore, directing governments to ensure that all agencies are ready to implement tougher measures as laid down in GRAP.

In addition, the EPCA is also advising schools to stop all outdoor activities and to keep exposure to a minimum. This is also advice to all citizens of Delhi and NCR. Under severe conditions as prevailing today, the health advisory of MOEF&CC says that it may cause respiratory effects even on healthy people. Therefore, exposure and outdoor activities, including intense physical activities should be minimised.

It is clear that combatting air pollution requires drastic action, which is long term. Mr Lal said: "We have achieved some things - often in the face of enormous odds -- and we have provided some solutions. So far, every solution that has been suggested has been contested and delayed. Today, weather conditions in Delhi-NCR are adverse, and the wind is bringing pollution from farm fires in Punjab and moisture from the east. In terms of air pollution, things are expected to get much worse in the coming days. We, therefore, need to act decisively."

The EPCA has called for the following long-term actions, which are in the hands of government. Unless these steps are taken starting today, air pollution levels cannot be brought down:

Drastic action is needed to immediately ban pet coke and furnace oil in the entire NCR. We need stringent monitoring of emissions in industrial estates and as well as from illegal industries.

A massive switch-over to gas is needed in vehicles, power plants and industry. The region needs a second transition to natural gas and clean fuels. We must prioritise transition to electric vehicles, and ensure supply of reliable power to stop the use of gen-sets.

A massive augmentation of public transport within and inter-city is needed. Not a single bus has been procured in Delhi over the last three years. This will only add to the pollution crisis.

Cities need massive action to change garbage management system to stop the burning of garbage. In addition, strict

enforcement is needed.

EPCA member and director general of Centre for Science and Environment Sunita Narain pointed out that unless this agenda is put in place, air quality cannot improve.