Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

News: EPCA declares public health emergency in Delhi-NCR.

Prelim focus: GRAP and key features, about EPCA

Mains focus: Concerns over rising pollution levels, challenges and ways to address them, need for a permanent solution.

Main Concern

AQM entered the “severe plus” or “emergency” category.

Background


Measures announced under GRAP- Severe+ or Emergency- (PM 2.5 over 300 µg/cubic metre or PM10 over 500 µg/cu. m. for 48+ hours):

1. Stop entry of trucks into Delhi (except essential commodities).
2. Stop construction work.
3. Introduce odd/even scheme for private vehicles and minimise exemptions.
4. Task Force to decide any additional steps including shutting of schools.

Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):

- Approved by the Supreme Court in 2016.
- It works only as an emergency measure.
- As such, the plan does not include action by various state governments to be taken throughout the year to tackle industrial, vehicular and combustion emissions.
- When the air quality shifts from poor to very poor, the measures listed have to be followed since the plan is incremental in nature.

Has it been helpful?
1. It has created a step-by-step plan for the entire Delhi-NCR region and getting on board several agencies including pollution control boards, industrial area authorities, municipal corporations, regional officials of the India Meteorological Department, and others.

2. It has been successful in fixing accountability and deadlines. For each action to be taken under a particular air quality category, executing agencies are clearly marked.

3. Coordination among as many as 13 agencies from four states is simplified to a degree because of the clear demarcation of responsibilities.

4. Three major policy decisions that can be credited to EPCA and GRAP are the closure of the thermal power plant at Badarpur, bringing BS-VI fuel to Delhi before the deadline set initially, and the ban on Pet coke as a fuel in Delhi NCR.

To address this menace, we need a permanent solution which might include the following:

1. Strict enforcement of lower pollution norms: Trucks and buses mixing kerosene and diesel should be impounded, and fined.
2. Buses from other states should be allowed to enter Delhi only if they meet certain pollution norms.
3. Constant monitoring of garbage dumps such as those in Bhalswa and New Ashok Nagar and any fire incidents at these places need to proactively put out.
4. Complete ban on burning of leaves in Delhi through the year.
5. All construction activity in Delhi should be done with draping, to ensure that dust and dirt doesn’t fly into the air. This is done everywhere else in the world.
6. Dust soppers can be run through Delhi roads regularly, every morning.
7. To prevent burning of wood etc during peak winters, build shelters for the homeless to sleep at night in the winters. Some of this has been done by the govt. More needs to be done.
8. Move Brick kilns out of Delhi within 3 years. This was done with tanneries almost 20 yrs ago.

About Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA):

- EPCA was constituted with the objective of ‘protecting and improving’ the quality of the environment and ‘controlling environmental pollution’ in the National Capital Region. The EPCA also assists the apex court in various environment-related matters in the region.
EPCA is Supreme Court mandated body tasked with taking various measures to tackle air pollution in the National Capital Region. It was notified in 1998 by Environment Ministry under Environment Protection Act, 1986.