

Press release

Only 31% of the 131 NCAP cities meet targets set by initial 2024 deadline

New Delhi, 9 January 2025 – The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) was launched in 2019 to improve air quality across India by reducing particulate matter concentrations. Initially targeting a 20-30% reduction in particulate matter by 2024, the programme was extended to 2026 with an enhanced goal of a 40% reduction in PM10 levels compared to 2017. However, findings from the latest **Tracing the Hazy Air 2025 report**, published annually by the [Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air \(CREA\)](https://www.energyandcleanair.org/), reveal significant challenges in meeting these targets.

Air quality improvement in NCAP cities

After six years of implementation, only 41 cities (out of 97 cities with at least 80% data in 2024) under NCAP have managed to achieve the initial target of a 20-30% reduction in PM10 levels by 2024. Due to a lack of transparency in city progress, it remains unclear how these cities achieved the reported 20-30% improvement in air quality, making it challenging to identify the specific actions that led to such reductions. Furthermore, several cities lack source apportionment-based action plans, and the underutilization of allocated resources raises serious concerns about the reliability and accuracy of the reported data.

The fact that the majority of cities are still struggling to meet even the initial target raises serious concerns about the feasibility of achieving the ambitious 40% reduction within the next two years. Additionally, 29 cities have reported an increase in PM10 concentrations compared to their baseline levels, indicating the need for enhanced efforts and strategies to address air pollution effectively.

PM10 trends across Indian cities and states

India's air quality remains alarming as 206 out of 253 cities with sufficient PM10 data in 2024 exceeded the NAAQS for PM10. Sri Ganganagar (Rajasthan), Greater Noida (Uttar Pradesh), and Delhi ranked as the most polluted cities, with annual PM10 levels of 236 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, 226 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, and 211 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, respectively. In the Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP), 74 out of 76 cities failed to meet the standard, while all 28 cities in the National Capital Region (NCR) exceeded the limits. States such as Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar, Haryana, Odisha,

Punjab, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand reported no monitored cities meeting the PM10 standard.

PM2.5 trends across Indian cities and states

For PM2.5, 150 out of 256 cities exceeded the NAAQS, with Byrnihat (Assam), Delhi, and Gurgaon (Haryana) ranking as the most polluted at 126 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, 105 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, and 91 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, respectively. In the IGP, 64 out of 78 cities failed to meet the standard, and in NCR, 27 out of 29 cities exceeded limits. State-level analysis revealed that all 8 monitored cities in Punjab exceeded PM2.5 NAAQS. High exceedance was also observed in Haryana (22 out of 24 cities), Bihar (20/23), Odisha (14/16), Rajasthan (26/36), Maharashtra (18/31), Uttar Pradesh (13/20), Madhya Pradesh (8/14), West Bengal (5/7), and Assam (4/6).

Air quality monitoring network

The number of India's Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) expanded by 27 stations (from 531 in 2023 to 558 in 2024), while the number of National Air Monitoring Programme (NAMP) manual stations grew by 35 (from 931 to 966). That brings the total to 1,524 air quality monitoring stations across 550 cities in 28 states and 7 Union Territories (UTs). However, concerns over data quality persist, with potential non-compliance with Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) siting guidelines. Notably, the growing number of monitoring stations has also been accompanied by an increase in non-attainment cities.

“The current static 130 cities list, unchanged since NCAP’s inception, fails to capture emerging non-attainment cities and does not allow successful cities to graduate from the program. With a growing number of cities exceeding air quality standards, NCAP 2.0 should revise and update the list of non-attainment cities every two years,” said Manoj Kumar, Analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

In NCAP cities where both CAAQMS and NAMP stations are present, data from both kinds is combined to measure air quality progress. However, this practice raises concerns about data integrity. While a CAAQMS provides continuous, high-quality data, manual NAMP data is intermittent, with just 104 measurements in a year.

“When datasets from both CAAQMS and NAMP are integrated, the resulting air quality assessment may be compromised. Therefore, comparing integrated data with CAAQMS data will be crucial to assess the influence of NAMP on the overall air quality assessment,” Manoj added.

Source apportionment

What's more, despite 130 cities being expected to complete source apportionment studies, only 50 have done so to date as per the NCAP implementation committee's Minutes of Meeting. However, the Portal for Regulation of Air Pollution in Non-Attainment Cities (PRANA) reveals that just 40 cities have reported completion, with many others failing to update their databases. Worse, only 17 cities have published detailed reports, leaving the rest without accessible results. This lack of timely updates and utilisation of the PRANA portal highlights a significant gap in the effective implementation of NCAP.

Funding

With regards to funding, ₹11,211 crore (approximately 1.3 million USD) was released under NCAP and Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV-FC) funds for 2019-2025, yet only 68% (₹7,594 crore) has been utilised as of the end of 2024. A disproportionate 67% of the funds were allocated to road dust management, while industries, domestic fuel, and public outreach each received just 1%. Capacity building and monitoring, vital for long-term solutions, accounted for only 4%.

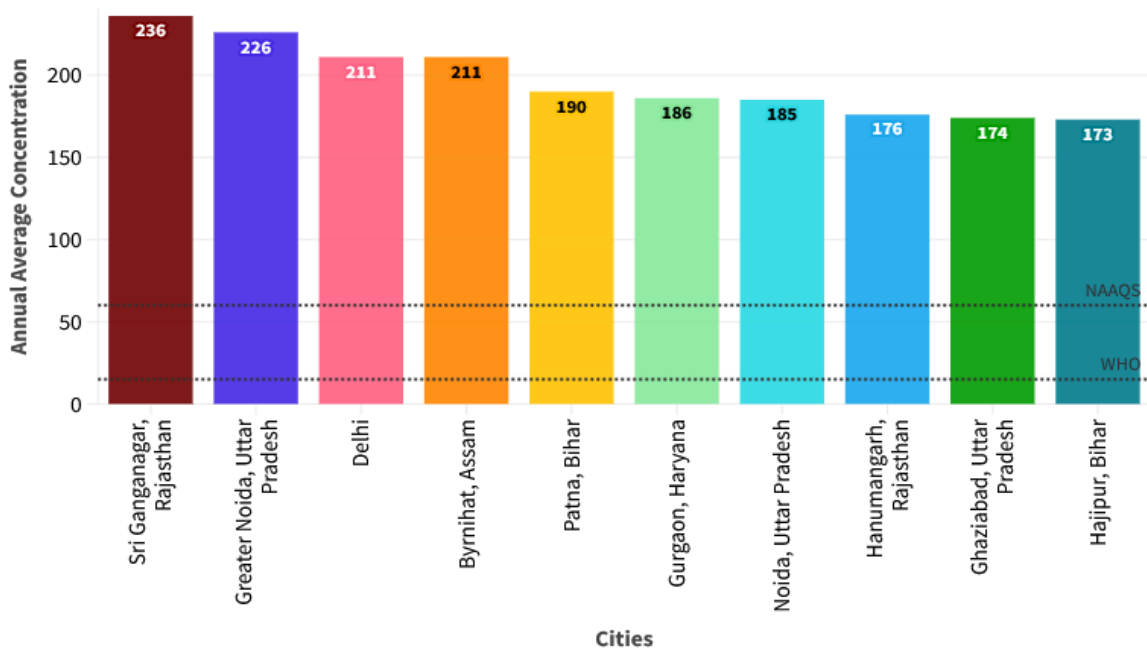
Recommendations

The current NCAP misses a critical health component and primarily focuses on PM10. NCAP 2.0 should address this gap by prioritizing PM2.5, as it poses a greater threat to human health. PM2.5 can penetrate deeper into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, leading to a broader range of severe health effects compared to PM10.

"Epidemiological studies have consistently shown that PM2.5 is linked to significantly higher increases in morbidity and mortality. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize PM2.5 over PM10 in NCAP 2.0. Also, stricter emission standards must be enforced to address the rising fuel consumption across all sectors, with penalties for non-compliance and no extensions granted for delays in implementation. Funding allocations should be guided by comprehensive source apportionment studies, and the regional action plan for the Indo-Gangetic Plain must be implemented effectively to achieve tangible progress," Manoj emphasised.

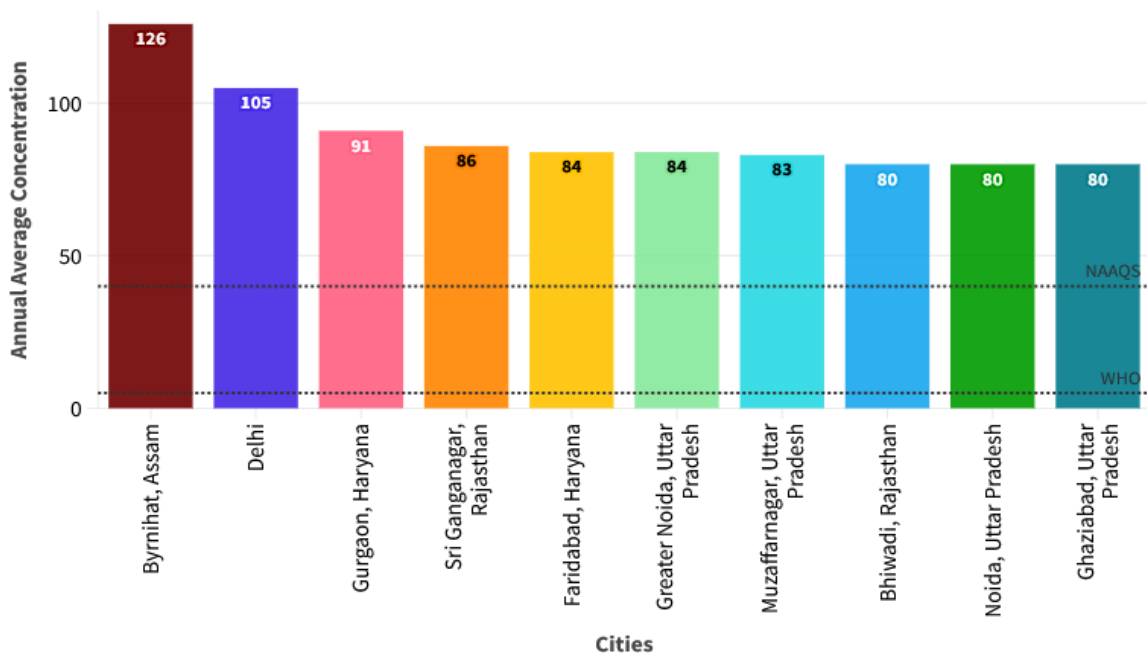
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Top 10 most polluted cities in India by PM10 concentration - 2024



Source: [CCR](#)

Top 10 most polluted cities in India by PM2.5 concentration - 2024



Source: [CCR](#)



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Notes to editors

- The full Tracing the Hazy Air 2025 report may be found [here](#).
- Previous Tracing the Hazy Air reports can be found here: [2022](#), [2023](#) and [2024](#).
- India monthly air quality snapshots can be found [here](#).
- Daily Air Quality Dashboard: <https://ncap.energyandcleanair.org/>

About CREA

The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) is an independent research organisation focused on revealing the trends, causes, and health impacts, as well as the solutions, to air pollution. CREA was founded in December 2019 in Helsinki and has staff in several Asian and European countries. The organisation's work is funded through philanthropic grants and revenue from commissioned research. www.energyandcleanair.org.