

Press release

Winter pollution worsens: 204 Indian cities breach air quality standards, up from 173 last year

New Delhi, 6 March 2026 – According to the winter 2025-26 air quality analysis by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), 204 out of 238 Indian cities with sufficient monitoring data recorded winter average PM_{2.5} concentrations above India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) of 40 µg/m³, based on Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) between 1 October 2025 and 28 February 2026. This marks an increase from 173 cities that exceeded the NAAQS during winter 2024-25. None of the analysed cities met the World Health Organization's (WHO) PM_{2.5} guideline of 5 µg/m³, as in the previous winter, when no city complied with the WHO limit.

Among National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) cities, winter 2025-26 air quality also showed widespread exceedances. Of the 96 NCAP cities with adequate data, 84 recorded winter 2025-26 average PM_{2.5} concentrations above India's NAAQS, while all 96 cities exceeded the WHO guideline. A similar pattern was observed among non-NCAP cities: of the 142 cities analysed, 120 recorded PM_{2.5} concentrations above India's national standard, and all 142 exceeded the WHO guideline.

In the Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP), 79 cities recorded sufficient monitoring data during winter 2025-26. Among them, 75 cities exceeded the national PM_{2.5} standard, while only four remained within the prescribed limit. In the National Capital Region (NCR), 28 of the 29 monitored cities recorded sufficient data coverage. None of these 28 cities complied with the national standard.

Across India, the distribution of PM_{2.5} AQI categories during winter 2025-26 showed that 19 cities fell under the 'Good' category (0-30 µg/m³), while 129 cities recorded 'Satisfactory' air quality (31-60 µg/m³). A further 65 cities fell under the 'Moderate' category (61-90 µg/m³). Additionally, 13 cities reported 'Poor' air quality (91-120 µg/m³) and 12 cities recorded 'Very Poor' air quality (121-250 µg/m³).

Ghaziabad ranked as the most polluted city in India during winter 2025-26, recording an average PM_{2.5} concentration of 172 µg/m³. Noida ranked the second most polluted city, with an average concentration of 166 µg/m³. Delhi ranked third, recording the average PM_{2.5} concentration of 163 µg/m³. During the winter 2025-26 period, Delhi experienced 18

'Severe' days, 87 'Very Poor' days, 24 'Poor' days, 15 'Moderate' days, six 'Satisfactory' days, and only one 'Good' day.

Greater Noida, Bahadurgarh, Dharuhera, Gurgaon, Bhiwadi, Charkhi Dadri, and Baghpat completed the list of the ten most polluted cities, with Greater Noida ranking fourth and Baghpat tenth. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana accounted for four cities each among the top ten most polluted cities, along with one city each from Delhi and Rajasthan.

At the state level, Haryana recorded the highest number of cities where all monitored locations exceeded the PM_{2.5} NAAQS, with 24 cities breaching the standard. Andhra Pradesh (nine cities), Punjab (eight cities), West Bengal (seven cities), and Gujarat (six cities) also recorded exceedances across all monitored cities. Rajasthan (33 of 34 cities), Maharashtra (30 of 31 cities), Bihar (23 of 24 cities), Uttar Pradesh (17 of 20 cities), Odisha (13 of 14 cities), and Madhya Pradesh (11 of 13 cities) also recorded high proportions of cities exceeding the national standard.

Chamarajanagar in Karnataka was the cleanest city in India during the winter of 2025-26, with an average PM_{2.5} concentration of 19 µg/m³. The ten cleanest cities included eight cities from Karnataka and one each from Madhya Pradesh and Meghalaya.

Among India's megacities, Delhi (163 µg/m³), Kolkata (78 µg/m³), Mumbai (48 µg/m³), and Chennai (44 µg/m³) recorded winter 2025-26 average PM_{2.5} concentrations above the national standard. Bengaluru recorded an average PM_{2.5} concentration of 39 µg/m³, slightly below the NAAQS limit.

'The comparison between the last two winters shows that widespread non-compliance continues, with more cities breaching the national standard in winter 2025-26 than in the previous winter. While the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has set PM_{2.5} reduction targets for the NCR region, similar nationwide PM_{2.5} reduction targets are needed with a stronger focus on controlling gaseous pollutants such as sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which contribute to the formation of secondary PM_{2.5} and ozone (O₃), a major component of particulate pollution', said Manoj Kumar, India Analyst, CREA.

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Note: The analysis was based on Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), covering the period from 1 October 2025 to 28 February 2026. Only cities with at least 80% data availability during this period were considered.



Contact

Manoj Kumar
India Analyst
Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA)
+91 9842350543
manojkumar@energyandcleanair.org

Notes to editors

- The winter 2025-26 Ambient Air Quality Snapshot can be found [here](#).
- Previous India monthly air quality snapshots can be found [here](#).
- The Daily Air Quality Dashboard can be found [here](#).

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. We use scientific data, research and evidence to support the efforts of governments, companies and campaigning organisations worldwide in their efforts to move towards clean energy and clean air. www.energyandcleanair.org.