Delhi Pollution: A Hazard to Mankind – A Comprehensive Research Paper.

By: KOSHIKA SINGH
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR (Dept. in Management),
HARIDWAR UNIVERSITY, ROORKEE.

Abstraction

India's capital, Delhi, is among the world's most polluted cities. Concerns about the city's extreme air pollution levels and their effects on the environment, economy, and public health are mounting. The purpose of this study paper is to examine Delhi's numerous pollution sources, the crisis's detrimental impacts on public health, the environment, and the socioeconomic ramifications. Along with discussing and assessing the efficacy of the government's and civil society's actions, the report offers suggestions for reducing the capital's pollution issue. It is backed up with statistics, facts, and data that demonstrate how serious this problem is.

1. **An Overview**
   With a population of more than 20 million, Delhi is dealing with an increasing air pollution problem that has gotten worse in recent years. It has continuously been rated as one of the world's most polluted cities. Public health is seriously endangered by Delhi's air pollution, which is mostly caused by industrial processes, construction dust, vehicle emissions, and agricultural burning in nearby states. The several aspects of Delhi's pollution issue, its repercussions on the populace, and the steps done to lessen those effects are all examined in this research study.
2. **Delhi's Pollution Sources**
   Transportation, industrial pollutants, agricultural practices, and construction activities are some of the sources of pollution in Delhi. The main contributors are highlighted in the sections that follow:

2.1 Emissions from Vehicles

About 30% of Delhi's total particulate matter (PM) load comes from vehicle emissions, making them one of the main causes of air pollution in the city. More over 10 million cars were registered in Delhi as of 2022, and more than 600,000 more are added every year. These cars mostly run on gasoline and diesel, which both emit dangerous pollutants such carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

• PM2.5 Concentration: The World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended limit of 10 µg/m³ is greatly exceeded by Delhi's yearly average PM2.5 concentration, which frequently exceeds 150 µg/m³. PM2.5 concentrations frequently surpass 300 µg/m³ during the months of October .

2.2 **Emissions from Industry**

The industrial sector, which encompasses power stations, cement manufacturing plants, and small industries, plays a major role in Delhi's pollution levels. As per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), industries in the vicinity of Delhi account for approximately 20% of the overall particulate matter in the city. The main contaminants released by industrial processes consist of PM10, sulfur dioxide (SO2), nitrogen oxides (NOx) , and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

• Power Plants: The coal-
powered plants in and near Delhi significantly contribute to SO2 and NOx emissions, leading to acid rain an d smog development. through December, when pollution is at its worst, resulting in dangerously high air quality.

2.3 Burning of Agricultural Residue.

An important factor in seasonal pollution in Delhi is the incineration of agricultural waste in nearby states like Pu njab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. In the post-harvest period (October-
November), farmers set fire to rice and wheat straw to swiftly clear their land. This activity emits large quantities

of particulate matter (PM2.5), carbon monoxide (CO), and methane (CH4) into the air, significantly worsening ai r quality.

• Stubble Burning Impact: In the stubble-
burning season, this activity is responsible for nearly 40% of the PM2.5 levels in Delhi. In November 2021, stubb le burning accounted for 44% of PM2.5 levels.

2.4 Building and Demolition Operations.

Due to fast urbanization, construction work in Delhi has increased, leading to elevated dust levels and particulate matter in the atmosphere. Construction and demolition operations contribute approximately 15% to Delhi's total p ollution burden.

• Dust Pollution: Dust generated by construction sites, roadwork, and demolition activities heightens PM10 levels , worsening the overall pollution load on the city.

2.5 Domestic and Business Activities

The combustion of biomass for cooking, heating, and waste disposal in informal sectors adds to the pollution in Delhi. The open incineration of trash, utilization of inferior fuels, and poor waste management practices contribut e to the particulate matter present in the air.

2.6 Weather-Related Factors

Delhi's geographical features and weather conditions intensify the pollution levels. During the winter season, the occ urrence of temperature inversion holds pollutants near the surface. Reduced wind speeds and fog in winter hinder th e dispersion of pollutants, resulting in considerably elevated pollution levels.

3. Health Impacts of Pollution

The health impacts of air pollution in Delhi are dire, contributing to a wide range of respiratory, cardiovascular, and neurological diseases. According to the 2020 State of Global Air Report, air pollution is responsible for approximately 54,000 premature deaths in Delhi each year.

3.1 Diseases of the Respiratory and Cardiovascular Systems.

The elevated levels of PM2.5 and NOx are directly associated with respiratory illnesses like asthma, chronic obst ructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer, and pneumonia. The World Health Organization (WHO) links 3 0% of respiratory illnesses and 20% of cardiovascular ailments in Delhi to air pollution.

• Lung Cancer and COPD: Research indicates that PM2.5 exposure notably elevates the risk of developing lung c ancer. A study conducted in 2019 by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) discovered that air pollutio n raised the lung cancer risk by 30% among residents of Delhi.

3.2 Early Death and Lower Life Expectancy

Prolonged exposure to air pollution in Delhi has resulted in a decrease in life expectancy. The State of Global Air 2020 report states that air pollution in Delhi decreases life expectancy by 6.3 years. The air quality in the city is s o bad that it greatly reduces the quality of life for countless residents.

• Early Deaths: In 2020, air pollution accounted for 54,000 early deaths in Delhi resulting from cardiovascular dis eases, respiratory illnesses, and other diseases linked to pollution.

3.3 Effects on Children and At-Risk Groups

Kids are especially susceptible to air pollution. Being exposed to contaminated air in childhood can result in hind ered lung development, reduced lung function, and an increased likelihood of asthma. Children in Delhi have de monstrated a 15-20% decline in lung function compared to those from areas with lower pollution.

• Asthma Prevalence: Research released by the Indian Medical Association (IMA) in 2018 revealed that almost 4 0% of students in Delhi suffer from asthma or other respiratory ailments due to high levels of air pollution.

3.4 Effects on Neurological and Mental Well-Being

Growing evidence connects air pollution to cognitive decline and neurological diseases. Studies suggest that contact with contaminants like PM2.5 and NOx could hinder cognitive performance, lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, and elevate the risk of neurological conditions like Alzheimer's disease.

4. Environmental Impacts

Delhi's pollution is also having a devastating effect on the environment.

4.1 Decline of Biodiversity and Deterioration of Ecosystems

Elevated air pollution levels have caused harm to vegetation, agricultural products, and natural habitats. Ozone, a se condary pollutant created from the interaction of NOx and VOCs under sunlight, damages plant tissues and decrease s agricultural productivity. The occurrence of acid rain, caused by SO2 and NOx, leads to the deterioration of soil an d aquatic environments.

4.2 Climate Change Contribution

The emissions of black carbon (a potent short-lived climate pollutant) and other greenhouse gases from Delhi's pollution sources contribute to global warming. Black carbon absorbs sunlight, heating the atmosphere and worsening the urban heat island effect, further intensifying the city’s temperature.

5. Government Efforts and Mitigation Strategies

Several measures have been introduced to combat the pollution problem in Delhi, though their implementation and effectiveness remain under scrutiny.

5.1 Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)

The Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), implemented by the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), is designed to take escalating actions based on the severity of air pollution. This includes measures such as the suspension of construction activities, halting the entry of trucks into Delhi, and the introduction of restrictions on industries during high pollution periods.

5.2 Odd-Even Scheme

To reduce vehicular emissions, the Delhi government has implemented the Odd-Even scheme, where cars with odd and even number plates are allowed on the road on alternate days. This scheme, though temporary, has led to a short-term reduction in traffic congestion and pollution levels.

5.3 Promotion of Electric Vehicles (EVs)

Delhi’s EV Policy aims to promote electric vehicles by offering incentives such as subsidies and tax rebates. The goal is to have at least 25% of all new vehicles in Delhi being electric by 2024.

5.4 Waste Management Initiatives

To reduce the pollution from waste burning, the Delhi government is working on improving waste segregation, recycling, and promoting waste-to-energy plants. However, the informal sector still accounts for a significant portion of waste disposal through open burning.

6. Recommendations

- **Stricter Emission Norms:** Implementing stricter vehicle emission standards and pushing for the widespread adoption of electric vehicles will help reduce vehicular pollution.

- **Regional Cooperation on Stubble Burning:** Addressing crop residue burning through incentives for farmers, better management of agricultural waste, and regional coordination with neighboring states can reduce the impact of this seasonal pollution.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Public education on the dangers of air pollution, including reducing reliance on private vehicles and adopting cleaner sources of energy, can help improve air quality.
- **Urban Greening and Sustainable Infrastructure:** Increasing green spaces in Delhi can help absorb pollutants and reduce the urban heat island effect, making the city more resilient to pollution.

7. Conclusion

Delhi's pollution crisis is a serious threat to both human health and the environment. Immediate and coordinated action is required to address the city's air pollution levels, which continue to worsen despite numerous government efforts. Implementing stricter regulations, promoting cleaner technologies, and raising public awareness are crucial to reversing the harmful effects of pollution in Delhi. Only through multi-level cooperation between government agencies, the private sector, and citizens can Delhi hope to breathe easier and reduce its impact on mankind and the planet.

References

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