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## Supreme Court bans pet coke, furnace oil to clean up toxic air in NCR

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The Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority (EPCA) had demanded prohibition on polluting industrial fuels.(Arvind Yadav/HT PHOTO)

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The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked three states to ban two cheap but highly polluting industrial fuels and pulled up the Centre for “sitting and doing nothing” to clean up the toxic air in the national capital region.

The court directed Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to notify the ban immediately after it was informed that pollution in NCR shot up after Diwali due to toxic gases emitted by industrial hubs which use furnace oil and petroleum coke, commonly called pet coke.

The court order was the latest in a series of steps taken by the judiciary to curb pollution in the country's capital, identified as one of the worst affected cities in the world by industrial and vehicular emissions.

Delhi banned the two fuels in 1996, but their use continued in NCR by cement factories, dyeing units, paper mills, brick kilns and ceramics manufacturers.

A bench headed by Justice MB Lokur said if the governments failed to notify the ban, its order will come into effect automatically from November 1.

Officials said the ban could hit several small and medium-scale industries, which employ thousands of workers.

An official of the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board said at least 137 units in Ghaziabad alone will have to switch to non-polluting fuel.

“The ban will lead to heavy losses to industries using such fuel. Furnace oil is used in estimated 50-60% industries,” said Dinesh Mittal, president of Sahibabad Industrial Area, Site-IV.

“In our areas we have the piped gas supply but not covering all areas. As an alternate, we can use CNG but it will cost us nearly 2-3 times more,” he added.

The exact number of workers employed by the 137 units was not immediately available, said JK Pandey, the district industries officer.

The court was informed that automobile fuel — petrol and diesel — has 50 parts per million (PPM) of the highly dangerous sulphur.

Comparatively, furnace oil has 15,000- 23,000 ppm sulphur and petcoke 69,000-74,000 ppm sulphur.

They emit sulphur oxide and nitrogen oxide, which form particulate matter, tiny particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs.

The court came down heavily on the Centre for not notifying emission norms for sulphur oxide and nitrogen oxide for 34 industries. The court also fined the government Rs 2 lakh for “not doing the job honestly”.

The Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority (EPCA) – a court-appointed panel -- had demanded prohibition on polluting industrial fuels.

“You have been sitting on the issue. The ministry’s behaviour is very insensitive. It wants more pollution,” the bench said when told that the Central Pollution Control Board had submitted a draft on the norms to the Centre in June but it was uploaded on the environment ministry website in October.

The top court ordered the government to complete the exercise by December 31.

Advocate Aparajita, assisting the court in the case, said pollution levels in Bhiwadi, Faridabad and Ghaziabad had spiked after Diwali.

The Centre, however, said it was still consulting the stakeholders.

*(With inputs from HTC, Ghaziabad)*