

Beijing on red alert for smog, schools directed to shutdown

07/12/2015 19:40 by admin

Beijing: China's capital today issued the first-ever red alert as the city of over 22 million people faced the worst ever smog, forcing authorities to shut down schools and putting restrictions on factories and traffic.

Beijing has upgraded its alert for air pollution from orange to red, the most serious level, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

This is the first time the capital has issued the red alert, which will last from 7:00 AM Tuesday to 12:00 PM Thursday. According to the city's emergency management headquarters, during a red alert, kindergartens, primary and high schools are advised to suspend classes, outdoor operations of construction sites are banned and some industrial plants are required to limit or stop production.

The notice, issued after days of heavy smog last week, also places traffic restrictions on certain types of vehicles in the city of 22.5 million people.

Car use will be limited as cars are allowed on the roads on alternating days depending on the odd or even numbers of their license plates. In addition, 30 per cent of government cars will be banned from streets on an odd and even basis, the statement said.

State television CCTV reported that Beijing authorities for the first time are considering to impose a congestion tax to ease traffic. At present over 30 per cent of the air pollution comes out of automobile emission.

According to the Beijing Municipal Environmental Monitoring Centre, heavy air pollution will linger until Thursday. It is expected to disperse Thursday afternoon as a cold front arrives.

The air quality alert of the US Embassy in Beijing showed a "very unhealthy" reading of PMI 2.5 (the tiny particles in the air that reduce visibility and cause the air to appear hazy when levels are high) at above 256 which could cause significant health problems for patients with heart and lung diseases and increase in respiratory effects among general population.

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