

Delhi restricts cars in attempt to lessen pollution

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Delhi restricted many private vehicles from the roads on Monday to try to lessen pollution as India [grapples with a public health crisis over its toxic smog](#).

The “odd-even” scheme will restrict private vehicles with odd-number licence plates to driving on odd dates while even-numbered plates are allowed on even-numbered dates. It was begun days after authorities in the Indian capital began emergency control measures and ordered the closure of schools as pollution levels reached a three-year high.

The state-run Central Pollution Control Board’s air quality index for Delhi was “severe” at 436, about nine times the recommended maximum.

Traffic police officers, wearing protective masks, signalled cars to stop for not following the temporary rule. Delhi’s chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, appealed for residents to follow the rule and for private taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers to support it.

Authorities said almost 1.2m registered vehicles in Delhi would be off-road every day during the two-week restrictions. People had a mixed response, with many seen outdoors not wearing protective masks.

“I don’t think this odd-even scheme will do anything. It’s mostly the stubble burning in the states of Punjab and Haryana which contributes to the pollution, and industrial pollution is also high,” said Ajay Jasra, a Delhi resident.

[Air pollution](#) in Delhi and northern Indian states peaks in the winter as farmers in neighbouring agricultural regions set fires to clear land after the harvest and prepare for the next crop season.

The pollution in the Indian capital also peaks after celebrations for Diwali, the Hindu festival of light, when people set off fireworks. Construction dust also sharply increases each winter, exacerbating what is already a public health crisis.

Last year, the Delhi government ordered firefighters to sprinkle water from high-rise buildings to settle dust, stopped garbage fires and ordered builders to cover construction sites to stop dust enveloping the area as hazardous air quality affected millions of people.

The vehicle restrictions have been the city government’s pet project to fight air pollution. The scheme was implemented twice in 2016 but remained controversial as critics have debated its success.

World Health Organization data released last year listed [India](#) as having the world’s 10 most polluted cities.

People distraught over the pollution say they want to leave the city of more than 20 million people because of its poor air quality.

“I feel like moving out as well because I’m young and I’m still on a stage of building up my life and my career,” said a Delhi resident, Divyam Mathur.