

Over a million people in India die every year because of indoor air pollution, among highest in the world, but the country's top advisory body the Planning Commission wants more epidemiological studies to agree for national indoor air pollution norms.

Indoor air pollution is bigger killer than outdoor air pollution in India with the recent global burden of diseases report listing the former as second biggest killer and latter as fifth largest. Around 1.3 million people died of indoor air pollution in 2010 whereas death because of outdoor air pollution was around 6.20 lakh. Indoor air pollution is second biggest killer after high blood pressure in India, the report said.

Unlike many western countries, India does not have any norm for indoor air pollution, which mandates emission norms for home appliances such as refrigerators, air-conditioners and bread toasters and a limit beyond which dirty air inside homes can be bad for one's health.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has prescribed 20 micro grams in cubic meter (ug/m³) of air for particulate matter as a norm for indoor air pollution. In India, the average indoor air pollution is 375 ug/m³ and the prime contributor for this is burning of solid fuels, says a study done by Indian Council for Medical Research.

High indoor air pollution had caught attention of policy-makers recently and environmentalists wanted the central government to prescribe national indoor air pollution norms on the lines of national ambient air norms.

Country's pollution watchdog, the Central Pollution Control Board, and public health research body, ICMR wanted the planning commission to agree for national indoor air pollution norms during the 12th five year plan.

The plan panel rejected the idea. "They (plan panel) wanted more epidemiological studies to be done to confirm the adverse health impact of indoor air pollution," said Kalpana Balakrishnan of the Sri Ramchandra Medical College and Research Institute, an ICMR affiliated body.

There is no dearth of Indian studies on adverse impact of indoor air pollution on one's health, especially the women. The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in a recent study said that 27.5 % of under-five infant mortality in India is because of indoor air pollution. Another study said that about 80 % of women in India are affected by indoor air pollution.

Rise in air pollution has direct co-relation with death. The ICMR study in Chennai on around 1,200 people showed an increase of 0.3 % to 0.6 % in mortality with rise in particulate matter pollution by 10 ug/m³. When half of Indian homes still use smoke-filled chullas, imagining its adverse health impact is no rocket science. That is not the plan panel's view.

1.3 million people in India die because of indoor air pollution every year, says a WHO study
About 27.5 % of under-five mortality is because of indoor air pollution, says a TERI study
Average indoor air pollution in India is 375 unit grams in cubic meter of air
The WHO norm is 20 unit grams in cubic meter of air
India does not have a norm for indoor air pollution