Chandigarh's Air Quality Stagnates Despite ₹31 Crore Investment Over Seven Years

Despite a substantial expenditure of ₹31.17 crore under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and XV Finance Commission schemes, Chandigarh has failed to achieve any measurable improvement in its air quality over the past seven years. Data presented in the Lok Sabha on Monday, July 21, 2025, by Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Kirti Vardhan Singh, revealed that the city's PM10 levels have remained stagnant at 114 micrograms per cubic meter from 2017-18 to 2024-25. This indicates that the significant financial outlay has not translated into tangible results for the city's air quality.

The Central Government had allocated ₹38.09 crore to Chandigarh under these initiatives since 2019-20, with a considerable portion already utilized. Yet, unlike several other major Indian cities that have shown improvement, Mumbai recording a 44% reduction in PM10, Kolkata 37%, and Delhi 15%, Chandigarh's pollution levels have neither decreased nor increased during this period. The NCAP, launched in January 2019, aimed to reduce particulate matter pollution by 20-30% by 2024, a target revised to 40% by 2026 for 130 cities, including Chandigarh.

Experts and environmentalists attribute Chandigarh's stagnant air quality to a confluence of factors, suggesting that while funds may have been allocated, the effectiveness of implementation remains a key concern. Prominent issues include the persistent dust generated from ongoing construction activities, a continually rising volume of vehicular traffic, the uncontrolled open burning of garbage and solid waste in various areas, and emissions from small-scale industries located in and around the city. Additionally, a perceived lack of public awareness and participation in pollution control efforts has been noted.

"Without curbing construction dust and vehicular emissions, the city's air quality will not improve," emphasized environmental advocates. They argue that Chandigarh requires a more targeted approach, coupled with stricter enforcement of existing regulations and greater citizen involvement, to yield positive change. Measures such as covering central verges with eco-friendly paver blocks or thick vegetation, washing city roads at night with tertiary treated water, and utilizing automated road sweeping and water fogging machines are among the initiatives undertaken to combat dust pollution. The city has also installed an air purification tower, though its effectiveness has been debated.

The fact that Chandigarh, often touted as a "City Beautiful" with its planned urban layout and significant green cover, has lagged in improving its air quality despite substantial investment raises questions about the efficacy of its pollution control strategies. The continued struggle highlights the complex, multi-source nature of air pollution and the need for comprehensive, well-executed action plans to protect public health. The focus must now shift to more rigorous implementation and oversight to ensure that future investments deliver the much-needed improvements in ambient air quality.