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PRESS NOTE: HOW DELHI'S AIR WORSENERD IN 2026 (JANUARY TO SEPTEMBER)

Dated: 1st October 2026

On CPCB's own data, Delhi's air got worse in 2026.

- On the same 39 stations, PM2.5 alone held the AQI at 500, the top of the scale, for 719 station-hours in 2026 against 221 in 2025, which is more than three times as many (a station-hour is one hour at one station, on the 24-hour running average).
- In those hours PM2.5 averaged 439 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, 29 times WHO's 24-hour guideline of 15 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, and at Anand Vihar on 18 January 2026 it reached 614 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ over 24 hours, more than 40 times that guideline, which the index can show only as 500.
- The average AQI from January to September was 167.6 against 164.3 in 2025, and from January to August it was 175.7 against 171.7.
- February (232.9 against 214.3), March (180.5 against 170.0), July (117.8 against 78.4) and August (95.5 against 88.6) were each worse than a year before, and July was Delhi's worst July since 2019.
- Only 60 of the 273 days had Good or Satisfactory air (AQI up to 100), fewer than one day in four, against 75 in 2025, while Moderate days (AQI 101 to 200) rose from 112 to 134.
- From 1 January to 28 September, the AQI was above 107.5, in the Moderate band, on three days in every four, where in 2025 that mark was 95.0, in the Satisfactory band.
- On 79 of the 273 days, more than one day in four, the air was Poor or worse, with an AQI above 200.
- On the 38 stations that reported in both years, PM2.5 from 1 January to 28 September averaged 70.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ against 69.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, and from 1 to 28 September it averaged 37.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ against 35.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
- The PM2.5 average of 69 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ that CAQM's own release of 30 September prints for 2026 is 13.8 times WHO's annual guideline of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ and 1.7 times India's annual standard of 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

For nine months, Delhi breathed PM2.5 at nearly 14 times the WHO guideline.

Sources: CPCB 4 PM AQI bulletins and CPCB station data, January 2022 to September 2026; CAQM press releases of 31 December 2025 and 30 September 2026; WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines 2021.

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