

Indonesia's diesel fuel 'dirtiest' in region: NGO

Activists warned the Indonesian government to comply with the commitment it made almost a decade ago to produce cleaner fuels to reduce air pollution in big cities across the country, as Indonesia's diesel was now the dirtiest fuel in the region. Indonesia, as stipulated in a 2003 ministerial decree, adopted Euro II, an international standard on emission levels from motor vehicles that required automobiles to use diesel fuel with sulphur content no higher than 500 parts per million (ppm). Diesel fuel currently sold in Indonesia has a sulphur content of 3,500 ppm, environmental NGOs said.

"Indonesia needs to move to cleaner fuels because they have a positive impact on the quality of air," Glynda Bathan Bateria, the policy and partnership manager of the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities Center, said in a meeting in Jakarta recently. Clean air activists and experts from seven countries, including Hong Kong and Vietnam, were in Jakarta last week to discuss air pollution in the region.

Sulphur is the main contributor to automobile emission pollutants nitrogen oxide and particulate matters, better known as the PM10. Polluted air can cause serious health problems in humans, including respiratory problems. The Euro II standard also requires vehicles to use catalytic converters to control emissions.

The NGOs claimed that all countries in ASEAN that had adopted Euro II had met their commitment to providing diesel of less than 500 ppm sulphur content except for Indonesia. Glynda said the countries in the ASEAN region such as Thailand were committed to moving further to the Euro IV with the government providing incentives for oil producing companies.

Thailand will upgrade to Euro IV in 2012, with a diesel fuel sulphur content of 50 ppm. Coordinator of Vietnam's clean air partnership, Phan Quynh Nhu, said that all diesel fuel sold at gas stations across Vietnam had sulphur content of less than 500 ppm. Vietnam will move to Euro III in 2018 and Euro IV in 2020.

Lee Shun-cheng Frank, an expert from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, said that incentives for oil producing companies and vehicle owners were the keys to achieving the Euro standards. Hong Kong adopted Euro V with a sulphur content of no more than 10 ppm.

The coordinator of the Joint Committee for Leaded Gasoline Phase Out, Ahmad Safrudin, said that the government paid less attention to clean air, though many promises were made in the last 10 years. "The Jakarta administration, for example, has done nothing to control air pollution, though the city issues a lot of regulations on emission levels," he said.

Ahmad warned that Indonesia, as this year's chairman of ASEAN, should take the lead in promoting cleaner air. An official from the Environment Ministry, Fitri Herawaty, said at the meeting that the office had had several talks with stakeholders, including oil producing companies, to reduce the sulphur content in diesel, but progress was slow.