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# S. Korea to apply stricter fine dust guideline to reduce air pollution

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The South Korean government will apply stricter guideline levels for health-threatening particulate matter (PM) to fight back the country's worsening air pollution.

Particulate matter, or fine dust dubbed as PM 2.5, is composed of a mixture of solid and liquid particles of organic and inorganic substances such as sulfate, nitrates, black carbon and mineral dust with aerodynamic diameters of less than 2.5 micrometers ( $\mu\text{m}$ ), according to World Health Organization (WHO). Exposure to such pollutants, which can penetrate the cardiovascular system, poses great health risks.

The Korean Ministry of Environment said Tuesday that the enforcement decree of tightening air quality guideline for fine dust was passed at the cabinet meeting.

Under the changed rules, the standards for PM 2.5 fine dust will be revised to daily average of 35 micrograms per square meters ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) from current  $50\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  and yearly average to  $15\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  from  $25\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , the same as those of Japan and the United States.

The new PM 2.5 standards will come into effect from March 27.

The ministry plans to further push up the regulatory level on PM 2.5 to be on par with the WHO's standards. The WHO has the strictest guideline limits on PM 2.5 level with  $25\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  for daily average and  $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  for an annual average.

Following the changes in PM 2.5 guideline values, the reference standard for issuing fine dust warnings will also be modified. Air quality with PM 2.5 level under  $15\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  will be labeled as 'good,' kept the same as before, but the level of 'moderate' will be changed to  $16\sim 35\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  from  $16\sim 50\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , 'unhealthy' to  $36\sim 75\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  from  $51\sim 100\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , and 'very unhealthy' to above  $76\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  from above  $101\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .

Under the stricter standard, the number of days with 'unhealthy' air quality would more than quadruple to 57 days around the capital from previous 12 days based on the 2017 record, whereas the number of days with 'moderate' air quality would fall to 210 days from previous 257 days.

The environment ministry also plans to modify enforcement rules under the Clean Air Conservation Act to strengthen the standards for fine dust watch and warning.

The air quality in Korea has been rapidly deteriorating with growing PM concentrations. The government has introduced a number of measures to clean the air, but so far has not made much progress.