

KSPCB's 75% air quality monitor stations not functional

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By Kapil Kajal

The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board's (KSPCB's) core task is to monitor, prevent and manage air pollution but only five out of its 20 air quality monitoring stations work properly.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the measurement of air quality is based on eight pollutants, which include PM10, PM2.5, and other such pollutants. There are 13 Manual Monitoring Centres under KSPCB, out of which two don't show any data, another five show data related to only four pollutants excluding PM2.5 (considered a major pollutant) and the remaining show the data only for five pollutants. There are seven KSPCB Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) in Bengaluru, of which two stations only show four pollutants excluding PM2.5.

The KSPCB is giving an average data, which is a wrong practice, Dr TV Ramachandra, a Senior Scientist with the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Sciences, said. He

explained that data about half of the pollutants are not available. Secondly, he said they are giving a misleading picture with the average pollution figure as it also factors in reading from areas with low pollution. This trivialises the extent of pollution in worst-hit areas.

"I don't believe in government data because they aren't appropriate. These data are combined to make yearly pollution levels of the city, and we know 15 out of 20 monitoring stations are either not giving the data or partially giving it, so the data we are getting is also partial," Dr Yellapa Reddy, the Governing Council Member of the Foundation for Ecological Security of India, told 101Reporters.

He highlighted that data for some of the most polluted parts of the city, like Peenya Industrial Area, are unavailable. He said it is important to understand the problem and how big it is. Without proper data, the problem will be ignored, he said. So, the KSPCB should change those machines to new and accurate ones as the 20-year-old machines will not work now, he commented.

Dr H Lokeshwari, Chief Scientific Officer of KSPCB, explained some stations are under maintenance while others are old. She added that since the CPCB released the PM2.5 data monitoring notification in 2009, and some stations are older than that, they cannot monitor PM2.5 data. "We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the manufacturers to replace or repair the machines. After that, we will start getting the missing data," she stated.

(Author is a member of 101Reporters.com, a pan-India network of grassroots reporters.)