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India mandates use of biomass pellets in some coal-fired plants

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By Sudarshan Varadhan



A worker carries coal in a basket in an industrial area in Mumbai, India May 31, 2017. REUTERS/Shailesh Andrade

CHENNAI, Oct 9 (Reuters) - India has made the use of biomass pellets mandatory in some coal-fired thermal power plants in a bid to cut air pollution by using agricultural waste that is otherwise burnt by farmers to generate electricity.

The decision, announced by the power ministry on Friday, makes it mandatory for three categories of thermal power plants to use a 5% blend of biomass pellets along with coal.

Farmers in some northern Indian states burn off vast swathes of paddy stalks and straw during the winter season to prepare the ground for planting. The process causes severe spikes in air pollution from late September which often lead to a thick blanket of smog over northern India.

The federal policy will come into force in October 2022, with a requirement to increase the proportion of biomass to 7% within two years for two categories of power plants.



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"The policy for co-firing of biomass would be in force for 25 years or until the useful life of the thermal power plant, whichever is earlier," the power ministry said in a statement.

Authorities in Delhi ordered a ban on the storage, use and sale of firecrackers in the Indian capital last month ahead of the Diwali festival in November to curb air pollution which causes thousands of deaths each year.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been tweeting about increasing pollution levels, and asking state governments in neighbouring states to keep stubble burning in check.

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