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Q17

What are the key features of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) initiated by the Government of India?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS III · 15 marks · Indian Economy

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Core demand of the question

- What are the key features of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) initiated by the Government of India?
- **NCAP 2019:** 20-30 per cent PM reduction by 2024 in non-attainment cities (122 in the expanded list), 2017 baseline. Do not substitute **WHO AQG 2021** numerical limits as NCAP targets
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

NCAP launched in 2019 as a national city-based clean-air programme.

The target is 20-30 per cent reduction in PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ by 2024 from 2017.

It covers non-attainment cities, expanded to 122, each with an action plan.

CPCB and State boards monitor; the Air Act remains the legal backbone.

WHO AQG 2021 guideline values are not NCAP's numerical target.

Introduction

The **National Clean Air Programme** was launched by MoEFCC in January **2019** as a national, time-bound, city-centred drive against particulate pollution. It is a **programme with targets and city plans**, not a new **Clean Air Act**, and not a transcription of **WHO Air Quality Guidelines 2021**. Those WHO numbers are a health benchmark. NCAP's own arithmetic was a **20-30 per cent cut in PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} by 2024** from a **2017** base in listed **non-attainment cities**.

Body

Key features

- **Target:** **20-30 per cent reduction in PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀** concentrations by **2024**, with **2017** as the baseline year - a percentage improvement, not a jump to WHO guideline values.
- **Geography:** started with **102 non-attainment cities** (cities that persistently missed National Ambient Air Quality Standards); the list was **expanded to 122 cities**. Answers should use the 122-city NCAP universe, not a WHO-city list.
- **City action plans:** each city to prepare and execute a plan (dust, transport, industry, waste burning, construction) under State boards, monitored through a national dashboard.

- **Institutional stack:** MoEFCC as sponsor, CPCB as coordinator, SPCBs/PCCs and municipal bodies as doers; later PRANA portal-type tracking of city progress.
- **Science backbone:** ambient monitoring expansion, source apportionment studies, and emission inventories so actions are not only odd-even theatre.
- **Sector menus** (indicative, city-specific): road dust, vehicular fleet and fuels, industrial stacks, brick kilns, biomass and municipal burning, and construction guidelines.
- **Collaboration:** IITs and institutes as technical partners; public awareness as a listed component.
- **Non-statutory character:** NCAP did not by itself create a new criminal offence. It sits beside the **Air Act, 1981**, **NAAQS**, and later the **CAQM** ordinance/Act for the NCR (end-2020 onward) which is a different, legally sharper NCR instrument.

What NCAP is not

- It is **not** 'India adopted **WHO AQG 2021**'. WHO 2021 annual PM_{2.5} guideline (5 µg/m³) is far stricter than Indian **NAAQS** and was not the NCAP 2024 target.
- It is **not** only a Delhi programme. Delhi is one non-attainment story; NCAP is a multi-city list.
- It is **not** a substitute for State industrial closure powers or for GRAP in the NCR.

Complementary 2019-20 air measures (distinct from NCAP features)

- **BS-VI** fuel and vehicles (2020), **SATAT** biogas, **FAME** for EVs, stubble-management machines, and **Ujjwala** LPG - these help air, but they are not themselves the NCAP document.
- Keep them as supporting context, not as NCAP's 'key features' list.

Limits

- A 20-30 per cent cut can leave a city still above **NAAQS**, let alone WHO.
- Municipal capacity, construction dust, and regional crop-fire are larger than a city plan PDF.
- Monitoring quality and independent evaluation decide whether 2024 is a real number.

Flow diagram

NCAP 2019 -> 20-30 percent PM by 2024
 NCAP 2019 -> 122 non-attainment cities
 NCAP 2019 -> City action plans
 WHO AQG 2021 -> Not the NCAP target
 20-30 percent PM by 2024 -> CPCB SPCB dashboard

Conclusion

NCAP's key features are a 2019 national programme, a 20-30 per cent PM cut by 2024 from 2017, 122 non-attainment cities, city action plans, and a CPCB-SPCB monitoring stack. It is India's city-PM campaign. It is not WHO 2021, and it is not a standalone clean-air statute.

Facts & figures

Launch

National Clean Air Programme, MoEFCC, January 2019.

20-30 per cent by 2024

NCAP particulate reduction target versus 2017 concentrations - the number to remember.

122 cities

Expanded non-attainment city list under NCAP (from an initial 102).

NAAQS

Indian National Ambient Air Quality Standards; non-attainment means persistent breach of these, not of WHO 2021.

WHO AQG 2021

Global health guidelines (e.g. much tighter annual PM_{2.5}). Not the NCAP 2024 target and not Indian law.

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