

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2475
TO BE ANSWERED ON 04.08.2025

Protection of Weaker Sections from Pollution

2475. SHRI SANJAY UTTAMRAO DESHMUKH:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the recently passed Environment (Protection) Fourth Amendment exempts the thermal power plants in category B and C areas from mandatory SO₂ emission control;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) the manner in which the Government justifies excluding rural, tribal and non-urban populations from the pollution protection given to urban areas;
- (d) whether the Government considers this policy to be discriminatory towards weaker section deprived of adequate healthcare and air quality safeguards; and
- (e) if so, the steps taken/being taken to ensure equal environmental protection for all irrespective of location and to address SO₂-related health risks in exempted areas?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a) & (b):

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Govt. of India notified emission standards for coal/lignite-fired Thermal Power Plants (TPPs) vide notification dated 07.12.2015. The SO₂ emission standards prescribed vide notification dated 07.12.2015 have been reviewed by the Central Government taking into consideration the various representations received regarding exemption or relaxation in timelines. Besides, studies conducted by research institutions regarding effectiveness and rationale behind these standards and its role in overall ambient air pollution of the region, were also considered to evaluate the need of universal applicability and enforcement of these standards. After detailed review of the matter, Ministry has recently issued notification *vide* G.S.R. 465 (E) dated 11.07.2025 regarding the applicability of SO₂ emission standards notified vide notification dated 07.12.2015. Accordingly, the applicability and timelines for compliance of SO₂ emission standards by TPPs are as follows:

Category	Applicability of SO ₂ emission standards	Timelines for compliance
Category A (Plants within 10 km radius of NCR or cities having million plus population)	Mandatory	31.12.2027
Category B (Plants within 10 km radius of non-attainment cities or critically polluted areas)	To be decided on a case to case basis by the Central Government based upon the recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee (Thermal Projects). In case any TPP is considered for exemption from SO ₂ emission standards, such TPP shall ensure meeting stack height as per notification no. G.S.R. 742 (E) dated 30.08.1990.	31.12.2028
Category C (Other than those included in Category A and B)	Not applicable subject to condition of meeting stack height as per notification no. G.S.R. 742 (E) dated 30.08.1990.	31.12.2029

(c) to (e):

The category-wise applicability of SO₂ emission standards in Thermal Power Plants (TPPs) has been decided based on detailed scientific studies and analysis of ambient SO₂ concentrations across the country, including areas near TPPs. This approach applies the precautionary principle for controlling and abating air pollution in densely populated and other air pollution-sensitive areas. The decision taken by the Central Government while issuing Notification dated 11.07.2025 is based on scientific approach, environmental sustainability and environmental benefits/loss in achieving SO₂ emission norms.

This approach demonstrates resource conservation by avoiding additional consumption of water, auxiliary power, and limestone; it also considers the increase in carbon footprint/CO₂ emissions resulting from the operation of deployed control measures, as well as the mining and transportation of limestone required for these measures. Furthermore, it takes into account the techno-economic feasibility of implementing such control measures across all coal/lignite-based TPPs. Additionally, the precautionary principle has been applied for control and abatement of air pollution in densely populated and other air pollution-sensitive areas, while also considering the heavy burden on consumers due to potential increases in electricity prices.

TPPs are required to comply with the emission standards notified by MoEFCC within the prescribed time limits, failing which environmental compensation shall be imposed on the non-compliant TPP units for operation beyond the prescribed time limit at prescribed rates. In all cases where SO₂ emission standards are not being made applicable, TPPs, irrespective of location, shall ensure compliance of stack height criteria notified vide notification number GSR 742 (E) dated the 30.08.1990.
