

India Air Quality  
November 13, 2017



# In-Touch

A message from your health and safety committee

Dear members,

Although smog is a common problem in many cities we fly into throughout India and China year-round, over the past week, airborne particulate levels in Delhi have hit record levels. The union is told that this is related to the burning of left over "crop stubbles" in the surrounding regions. Crop stubbles are the 1-2 feet of stalks left over after combines have been used for harvest in mechanized agriculture.

This bulletin is meant to provide some information for crew who are scheduled to operate into Delhi over the coming weeks, but also as a general source of information for those who fly routes where air quality is known to be an issue.

## **How is air quality measured and where can real-time data be found?**

Air Quality is measured all over the world according to a standardized air quality index. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency offers an explanation of the air quality Index here (English only):

[https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/aqi\\_brochure\\_02\\_14.pdf](https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/aqi_brochure_02_14.pdf)

The World Air Quality Index Project offers real-time air quality data for cities all over the world. New Delhi real-time air data - provided by the U.S. Embassy is available here:

<http://aqicn.org/city/india/new-delhi/us-embassy/>

## **Should I be concerned?**

The World Health Organization states that "air pollution increases the risk of respiratory and heart disease in the population. Both short and long term exposure to air pollutants have been associated to health impacts. More severe impacts affect people who are already ill. Children, the elderly and poor people are more susceptible." It is important to

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Note that even healthy individuals engaged in physical activity may experience adverse health symptoms when air quality index levels are high.

The Government of Canada summarizes health risks here (bi-lingual site):

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/health-risks.html>

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also provides information about the health effects of poor air quality in its brochure (English only):

[https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/airnow\\_aqi\\_brochure\\_02\\_14.pdf](https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/airnow_aqi_brochure_02_14.pdf)

Air pollution is a recognized hazard in the company's hazard prevention program.

Mitigation measures include:

- Those with underlying heart and lung conditions, children, and older adults flying to a destination with air quality problems, should speak to their physician, as they may be adversely affected by lower air quality index levels than the average population.
- It is recommended that strenuous activity, and time outdoors be limited as much as possible when air quality index levels are high. Even healthy individuals engaging in physical activity may experience adverse effects in high smog conditions. Crews are generally advised to remain inside their hotel room.

### **What is the union doing?**

CUPE stands by the rights of every worker to know the hazards that they may be exposed to in the course of work.

- The union's hotel committee has confirmed that inspection of hotel room HVAC systems, and their maintenance schedule is part of the hotel selection process.
- Your CUPE OHS reps have worked with their management colleagues at the joint health and safety committees to request a re-issue of the company's air quality bulletin dated March 14<sup>th</sup> 2017. In the mean time, the company has committed to providing this document to those scheduled to operate to Delhi.

The CSEQ bulletin can be viewed in ACAeronet > Safety > Bulletins and alerts > Air Pollution in China and India – update

- The union is aware that the company has provided surgical masks for crew to wear while in transit to the hotel. However, surgical masks offer little-to-no protection against airborne particulates.

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Your CUPE OHS representatives and elected union officials have requested that the company provide N95 masks to crews operating to destinations where air quality index levels are forecasted to be high, by requiring a check-in at crew centres where a fit test could be performed. The Canadian Occupational Health and Safety Regulations require that all employers follow fit-test standards outlined by the Canadian Standards Association when respirator devices are supplied to workers.

A fit test is not required for the use of respirator devices (including N95) purchased by individuals, and these can be commonly purchased at hardware stores. However, the union must advise its members that the effectiveness of an N95 or other respirator designed for airborne particulates may be seriously compromised if there is a poor fit, if it is not used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, or if it is not of good quality. Therefore the union cannot recommend that its members purchase their own masks.

For more information, members may find CUPE's fact sheet on respiratory protection helpful.

CUPE Respiratory Protection Fact Sheet:

[https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/respiratory\\_protection\\_en\\_v2.pdf](https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/respiratory_protection_en_v2.pdf)

Fiche d'information SCFP- protection respiratoire:

[https://scfp.ca/sites/cupe/files/respiratory\\_protection\\_fr\\_v3.pdf](https://scfp.ca/sites/cupe/files/respiratory_protection_fr_v3.pdf)

- Your component is investing heavily in training for union reps on issues relating to health and safety, as well as securing subject matter experts for ongoing consultation. As we fly to more destinations where air pollution may be an issue, the union intends to solicit advice on this topic, and one such meeting is already in the works.

### **What do I do if I am scheduled or called on reserve to operate to a destination with high levels of air pollution and have concerns?**

1. If you are on reserve, let Crew scheduling know of your concern at time of assignment. If they cannot give you something else, ask to speak to a safety manager.
2. Speak with the safety manager, and if you are still concerned ask your safety manager to be placed on another assignment. For block holders this would result in being placed on reassignment.

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3. If your safety manager cannot accommodate your request, report for work, where you may once again raise your concerns with management.

4. Every employee always has the right to refuse dangerous work if they feel that it will cause an imminent or serious threat to their, or someone else's life or health. It is an individual decision, must be made while physically at the workplace, and must be made in good faith.

5. DO NOT book off as a preventative measure. This will count towards CAMS, and you may be unable to provide medical substantiation if requested.

**For your convenience, a CUPE contact sheet can be downloaded by clicking [HERE](#).**

In Solidarity,

Your Air Canada Component of CUPE Occupational Health and Safety Committee

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