

# Dust choking residents, destroying their lungs



■ Dust contributes to 52% of particulate matter in the air.

RAVI CHOUDHARY/HT PHOTO

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**NEW DELHI:** Every day at work is a battle with dust, cement and construction waste for Vikas Kumar who works at a flyover construction site in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh. His job earns him only a few hundred bucks a day but has affected his health severely.

For the past two months, Kumar has been coughing blood. Doctors say the coarse dust particles have bruised his respiratory tract. Kumar said workers work with no safety gear, masks or gloves to protect them from the constant exposure but the contractors do not mind compromising on the health of hundreds of workers working for over 12 hours a day.

Over the years, Delhi has become a challenging workplace for many like Kumar. "We spend at least 12 to 14 hours in this dust. Though we are given equipments to save us from physical harm, the internal damage is bigger," said Kumar.

A research released by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in November found that higher levels of coarse particles in the air was leading to an increase in cardiovascular-related hospital stay for people 65 years

and older in the US.

The researchers said this was so far the strongest evidence to show that coarse particulate matter (sized 2.5 to 10 microns in diameter) released into the air from construction projects among other things were extremely harmful for humans. If the concern raised in a country like the US is so high, then back in India the condition is worse.

Experts said constant exposure to dust particles can lead to a person inhaling both visible as well as suspended particulate matter. "Over the years, if a person is constantly exposed to dust and construction waste, he or she runs the risk of inhaling silica which escapes the filter mechanism of the nose and the throat. This reduces the capacity of the lungs and makes the person vulnerable to diseases like tuberculosis and other problems," said Dr Neeraj Jain, chest specialist at Ganga Ram Hospital.

In an affidavit submitted by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) to the Supreme Court, it was noted that dust particles was the highest source of pollution in Delhi. While dust contributed to 52% of particulate matter in the air, vehicular emission contributed to only 6.6%.