Indian cities among most toxic category, says WHO report

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THE AIR QUALITY IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND NEIGHBOURING AREAS HAS WORSENED THIS YR DESPITE FAVOURABLE WEATHER CONDITIONS

PARIS: The World Health Organization (WHO) is set to release a new report with more Indian cities in the "most toxic air" category even as health experts warned on Wednesday that fresh evidence shows polluted air kills more people than tobacco.

Last year, 13 Indian cities including Delhi were among the top 20 most-polluted ones in the world, a year after a Lancet report described air pollution as the sixth biggest killer in the country.

The air quality in the national capital and neighbouring areas has worsened this year despite more favourable weather conditions. Carlos Dora, head of the WHO's air pollution analysis unit, told Hindustan Times the pollution problem in cities like Delhi was because of lack of awareness among the local population about its health impact.

"Though you and I may know what air pollution does to our health, people on the streets of Delhi or Mumbai may not know it. That prevents creating a political momentum for improving air quality," he said. "Our data clearly shows that air pollution is an increasing health hazard on which local authorities need to act."

Sources say the report of 2,000 cities is likely to have more Indian cities in the top bracket, pointing to a surge in the spread of toxicity in the air above urban Indian areas housing around 36% of the country's population.

Dora said they will soon launch an awareness campaign in Asian cities including some in India on the effects of air pollution.

The WHO will come out with its new ranking of the most-polluted cities in the world by February 2016.