

Online repository set up to compile research on air quality in country

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The Council of Scientific Industrial Research (CSIR)'s National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) on Wednesday launched what it said was the country's first interactive online repository, IndAIR (Indian Air quality Studies Interactive Repository).

Dr Rakesh Kumar, Director of CSIR-NEERI said the aim of the project is to make air quality research available to everyone. NEERI has been working to develop a web repository of all the research that has been done on the subject in the country.

IndAIR has archived approximately 700 scanned documents from pre-Internet times (1950-1999), 1,215 research articles, 170 reports and case studies, 100 cases and over 2,000 statutes to provide the history of air pollution research and legislation in the country. This includes all major legislation in the country dating back to 1905.

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It took 22 people and 11 months to give shape to IndAIR. This included procuring archived material from various institutions across the country, looking into studies available outside the Internet domain, developing the website and interviewing experts across India to comprehend the scope of the history and the project. The endeavour received support from institutions such as the National Institute of Science, Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) and National Archives of India (NAI). Institutions such as The Energy Resources Institute (TERI), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) also partnered with NEERI for the project.

“Several documents related to the research on air pollution were not in the public domain. We have digitised them,” Kumar said.

He further said there were examples when government agencies were able to regulate the emission of pollutants from industries. He cited an example of Chembur in Mumbai being critically polluted in the 1970s and 80s.

“After computer modelling, we arrived at estimates as to what was the likely amount of pollutants in the air due to emission from industries. We were able to set emission control limits for these industries, which later helped clean up the air,” Kumar told The Indian Express.

He pointed out that previously, it was difficult to import anything and hence air quality instruments were fabricated and designed in the country. “Now we are getting sensors which are perhaps not tested and getting all kind of numbers related to air quality. We are creating a hotchpotch situation and need to be responsible when we are looking at numbers,” Kumar said.

Referring to the current “emergency-like” situation due to severe air quality in Delhi, the NEERI director said it was an “episodic” situation.