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Air pollution to blame for traffic accidents: study

- PTI



Picture shows highly polluting vehicles plying on roads in India, which have not been taken off the roads despite rules being in place for that. Latest research shows that toxic air impairs driver fitness, while watery eyes and an itchy nose could also be distracting for motorists. Photo: S. Ramesh Kurup

NO₂ rising by just one microgramme/cubic metre above the daily average is sufficient to increase the average number of accidents daily by two per cent

London: Air pollution may be responsible for hundreds of car accidents a year, as toxic air may impair driver fitness, a new UK study has found.

Researchers from the London School of Economics divided the UK into a grid of 32 areas each covering about 7,700 square kilometres and mapped accidents to the level of air pollution between 2009 and 2014.

They found a rise in the concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) of just one microgramme per cubic metre above the daily average is sufficient to increase the average number of accidents each day by two per cent, with the biggest effect occurring in cities.

Researchers found that the increase remained even when adjusting rise in the concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) of just one microgramme per cubic metre above the daily average is sufficient to increase the average number of accidents each day by two per cent for the extra traffic.

Impact on driver fitness

Toxic air impairs driver fitness, while watery eyes and an itchy nose could also be distracting for motorists, they said.

According to a recent study, air pollution inside a car can be more than double that on the outside because the NO₂ builds up in a small space, 'The Telegraph' reported.

"Although it has already been shown that air pollution adversely affects human health and the ability to carry out mental tasks, this is the first published study that assesses the impact on road safety," said Lutz Sager of the LSE.

Air pollution can result from many different toxins, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, small particulate matter and ozone. However, NO₂ was found to have the biggest impact.

