

SKoreans buy air purifiers amid "yellow dust" warning

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Skyscrapers in downtown Seoul in March 2006 are shrouded by yellow dust storms blowing in from China's Gobi desert. South Koreans are stocking up on air purifiers following a forecast of especially severe "yellow dust" storms from China and Mongolia this spring, officials said Friday.

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Forecasters say the annual dust storms will be particularly bad this spring because north China and the deserts of Mongolia, where they originate, suffered the worst drought in 50 years.

The temperature there is also two to six degrees Centigrade higher than usual, adding momentum to the dust storms which usually strike South

Korea and Japan between March and early May and cause health problems.

"The sales of air purifiers have gone up 30 percent since the forecast about the yellow dust storms on February 20," Sohn Min-Ok, manager of electronics retailer Himart, told AFP.

"Sales of air purifiers are expected to rise further as electronics makers are introducing new models late this month and in March to meet growing demand," she said.

Shares of companies expected to benefit from the storms, such as filter makers and eye drop manufacturers, have also surged -- bucking the overall trend.

Yellow dust -- fine sand from northern China and Mongolia's Gobi Desert -- sometimes includes industrial pollutants emitted by Chinese factories and can cause respiratory disorders.

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