

Asia air pollution deaths to rise, environment group says

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Traffic gridlock is seen in Hong Kong. Air pollution in Asia, which already kills at least 800,000 people each year, will likely lead to even higher death rates as the region's air quality worsens, an environmental group warned Wednesday.

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Energy consumption and rising vehicle emissions amid Asia's [rapid](#)

[economic growth](#) are the main driving force behind the region's increasingly acute air pollution, according to air quality group Clean Air Asia.

"What we are worrying is that we are seeing the PM10 concentration (level) is on the rise again," the group's executive director Sophie Punte told a regional conference on air pollution in Hong Kong.

"Seven out of 10 cities in developing Asia are breathing air that is harmful to their health," she told 600 environmentalists and government officials gathered at the "Better Air Quality" conference organised by the group.

PM10 are [air particles](#) that are 10 micrometres, or 10 millionths of a metre (0.0004 of an inch), across.

The group says air pollution will rise as the number of vehicles in Asia is expected to exceed one billion by 2035, while its fuel consumption and resulting [carbon dioxide emissions](#) will grow by 400 percent compared to its 2005 levels.

A [World Health Organization](#) study in 2008 found 800,000 out of 1.3 million [premature deaths](#) each year due to air pollution are in Asia, and experts warn the figure could rise if no urgent action is taken.

"Our concern is that as pollution begins to rise, the toll—which is already significant—will start to escalate again," US-based Health Effects Institute vice chairman Robert O'Keefe said.

O'Keefe, who is also Clean Air Asia's trustees board chairman, said research had shown the deaths attributed to air pollution could double by 2050 if "business is as usual".

Asian countries like China—which suffers from [industrial pollution](#), increasing traffic and lax protection measures—has come under pressure in recent years to tighten its air quality standards.

In Hong Kong, where its famed skyline is often covered in smog, the government has vowed to cut emissions from power plants and phase out polluting diesel vehicles as part of an ongoing effort to tackle air pollution.

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