

# Indian capital engulfed in smoke after landfill catches fire

April 27 2022, by Aniruddha Ghosal

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A boy rides a bicycle amidst thick smoke coming out of a fire at the Bhalswa landfill in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup

Acrid smoke hung over New Delhi for a second day on Wednesday after a massive landfill caught fire during a scorching heat wave, forcing informal waste workers to endure hazardous conditions.

The landfill in northern Delhi's Bhalswa is taller than a 17-story building and covers an area bigger than 50 football fields. Waste workers who live in nearby homes had emptied onto the streets on Tuesday evening. But by Wednesday morning, the thousands of people who live and work at the landfill had begun the dangerous process of trying to salvage garbage from the fire.

"There's a fire every year. It is not new. There is risk to life and livelihood, but what do we do?" asked Bhairo Raj, 31, an informal waste worker who lives next to the landfill. He said that his children studied there and he couldn't afford to leave.

The Indian capital, like the rest of South Asia, is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave that experts said was a catalyst for the landfill fire. Three other landfills around the Indian capital have also caught fire in recent weeks.

The landfill in the latest fire was planned for closure more than a decade ago, but more than 2,300 tons of the city's garbage is still dumped there every day. The organic waste in the landfill decays, resulting in a build-up of highly combustible methane gas.



Delhi fire officials take a break while dousing a fire at the Bhalswa landfill in New Delhi, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. A massive landfill in New Delhi caught fire on Tuesday evening, engulfing the city in thick, acrid smoke. The Indian capital, like many other parts of South Asia, is battling a record-shattering heatwave. Every day more than 2,300 tons of garbage is dumped at the landfill without being segregated, resulting in the build-up of combustible methane gas. And experts say that this gas, alongside the high temperatures, may have been a factor behind the fire. This is the fourth such fire in a landfill in past weeks. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A ragpicker woman living on the edge of Bhalswa landfill walks past during a fire in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



Smoke rises from a fire at the Bhalswa landfill, in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A Delhi fire tender waits during a fire at the Bhalswa landfill in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A van drives past a raging fire at the Bhalswa landfill, in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A rickshaw drives amidst thick smoke coming out of a fire at the Bhalswa landfill in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup





A thick layer of smoke coming out of a fire at the Bhalswa landfill envelops the area, in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



Fire officials assess a raging fire at the Bhalswa landfill in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



Fire officials try to douse a fire at the Bhalswa landfill in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 27, 2022. The landfill that covers an area bigger than 50 football fields, with a pile taller than a 17-story building caught fire on Tuesday evening, turning into a smoldering heap that blazed well into the night. India's capital, which like the rest of South Asia is in the midst of a record-shattering heat wave, was left enveloped in thick acrid smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



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"With high temperatures, this spontaneous combustion will take place," said Ravi Agarwal, the director of Toxics Link, a New Delhi-based [advocacy group](#) that focuses on [waste management](#).

Several fire engines rushed to the landfill on Tuesday to try and douse the fire. At night, the landfill resembled a burning mountain and it

smoldered until [early morning](#).

March was the hottest month in India in over a century and April has been similarly scorching. Temperatures crossed 43 degrees Celsius (109.4 F) in several cities Tuesday and are forecasted to continue rising.

"India's current heatwave has been made hotter by [climate change](#)," said Dr. Friederike Otto, senior lecturer in [climate science](#) at the Grantham Institute in Imperial College London.

She said that unless the world stops adding [greenhouse gases](#) to the atmosphere, such heat waves will become even more common.

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