

Chiang Mai has the world's worst air pollution, but Thailand says it's ready to act.

Wednesday 3 April, 2019

It's an undoubtedly a regrettable position to be in: ranked as the city with the most-polluted air in the entire planet, and no doubt Chiang Mai's residents can attest to this. Thankfully for them, it now seems their government has recognised the problem and is prepared to do something about it.

The Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha visited the northern city on Tuesday, with the leader's presence showing how seriously the matter is now being taken, and his words suggest they'll act quickly: "The government will try to tackle this within seven days."

Prayut met with local officials to converse with them over the different ways to solve the problem that's proving a real health hazard for both residents and tourists alike. In face, the situation has now become so serious that even the head of the monarchy has voiced his concerns, with King Maha Vajiralongkorn telling the authorities in no uncertain terms that the putrid air needs to be tackled head on right away.

The website airvisual.com, where users can explore air quality levels across the world, has placed Chiang Mai at the very bottom of the charts worldwide for more than a week, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 409, which equates to a "hazardous level".

And smog-filled photos posted online certainly seem to prove the case that Chiang Mai is heavily polluted. Some residents say they cannot see more than a few hundred metres, and that they cannot go outdoors until there has been an improvement in air quality.

Richard Barrow, an online travel blogger, has been tweeting about the effects, saying the map of the polluted areas "makes it look like Northern Thailand is on fire" and that "it would be stupid not to wear smog masks".

Greenpeace as well as academics have also entered the debate surrounding the pollution, with them laying a portion of the blame at the feet of those burning agriculture in the region, and have stressed to authorities the importance of enforcing environmental laws.

With the now world watching, and both Thailand's government and monarchy now voicing their desire to do something about it, hopefully Chiang Mai's residents will soon be able to breathe easier.

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