

COYHAIQUE IS CHILE'S SMOGGIEST CITY AFTER SANTIAGO

Contributed by Natalie Muller
Wednesday, 10 June 2009

According to a National Environmental Committee (CONAMA) study of air pollution in Chilean cities excluding Santiago, Coihaique (Region XI) has the most critical levels of atmospheric contamination, followed by Rancagua (Region VI), Osorno (Region X) and Temuco (Region IX).

The amount of heavy particle matter per cubic meter was measured to determine the severity of the air pollution in each city.

While the maximum permitted annual average of pollution is 50ug/m³, Coihaique was found to have an average of 80ug/m³ in heavy particle matter in 2008 and 2009. Rancagua and Osorno's annual average also exceeded the permitted maximum, recording an average of 69ug/m³ and 68ug/m³ respectively.

The report said that the accepted maximum daily amount of 150ug/m³ is exceeded around 11 days a month in colder cities such as Coihaique and Osorno because 97 percent of the population uses firewood for heating homes. Firewood generates 35 percent of the pollution while 50 percent comes from forest fires and agricultural back burning. Municipalities in these high-risk regions are now taking action to curb rising pollution during the winter. Authorities in Rancagua have declared the surrounding Central Valley region a Saturated Zone – the first step toward implementing an Atmosphere Decontamination Plan. Such a plan is already in effect in Temuco, where the amount of air contamination has tripled in the last four years.

The Temuco Municipality rewards those who use dry wood instead of damp wood, which is the more potent pollutant. Also a plan is underway to provide filters for 6,000 of the 22,000 wood stoves in the area to lessen the amount of heavy particle matter entering the atmosphere.

According to various World Health Organization (WHO) studies, the kind of heavy particle matter pollution seen in these cities can severely affect health, quality of life, and susceptibility to illnesses, especially in young children and the elderly.

SOURCE: EL MERCURIO, LA TERCERA
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