Air quality

Clean air is essential for the health of humans, animals and the environment. Monitoring air pollutants helps us maintain our good air quality in NSW.

Air quality measures the amount of pollutants in the air we breathe relative to their potential impacts on our health. Good air quality means that while some substances and pollutants could still be found in air, they are not considered to be harmful.

In NSW, the major air pollutants monitored are particles and ozone. These mostly come from bushfire smoke, dust, and fossil fuel combustion from motor vehicles and industry.

At a glance

How NSW is tracking

- NSW air quality met national standards most of the time.
- The number of days exceeding these standards varies greatly each year depending on natural climate variations and local weather.
- While the community is generally satisfied with air quality in NSW, where concerns were raised at a local level, air pollution from road traffic and trucks was identified most often.
- Without addressing air pollution, health impacts will continue to increase as our population grows and becomes denser.

Days air quality standards exceeded

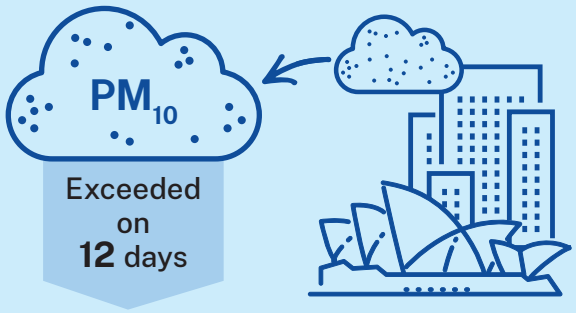
Air quality standards for one or more pollutants were **exceeded** on **47 days** in **2023**. This compares with 19 days in 2022 and 53 days in 2021.

The big picture

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that air pollution is as serious as other major global health risks, such as exposure to tobacco smoke and an unhealthy diet.

Particulate matter pollution

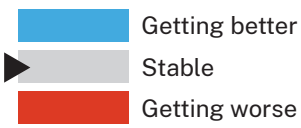
Sydney exceeded air standards for PM_{10} on **12** days in 2023.



Air quality

NSW status and trend indicators

These indicators measure air pollution concentrations in NSW.

Indicator	Environmental status	Environmental trend	Information reliability
Particles as PM_{10}	 MODERATE	 Getting better, Stable, Getting worse	Good
Particles as $PM_{2.5}$	 MODERATE	 Getting better, Stable, Getting worse	Good
Ozone (O_3)	 MODERATE	 Getting better, Stable, Getting worse	Good
Carbon monoxide (CO)	 GOOD	 Getting better, Stable, Getting worse	Good
Nitrogen dioxide (NO_2)	 GOOD	 Getting better, Stable, Getting worse	Good
Sulfur dioxide (SO_2)	 GOOD	 Getting better, Stable, Getting worse	Good

Indicator table scales

- **Environmental status:** Good, moderate, poor, unknown
- **Environmental trend:** Getting worse, stable, getting better, unknown
- **Information reliability:** ■■■ Good ■■■ Reasonable ■■■ Limited

Indicator definitions

PM_{10} – Particles which are 10 micrometres (10µm) or less in diameter.

$PM_{2.5}$ – Particles which are 2.5 micrometres (2.5µm) or less across.