



FGD Exemption for Thermal Plants

[Source: TH](#)

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has exempted 78% of India's [thermal power plants](#) from installing [Flue Gas Desulphurisation \(FGD\) systems](#), raising air pollution and public health concerns.

- **FGD Role:** These are used to cut [sulphur dioxide \(SO₂\)](#) emissions from coal-based thermal power plants. FGD systems commonly use **limestone (CaCO₃)**, **lime (CaO)**, or **ammonia (NH₃)** as **reagents** to neutralize SO₂ in flue gases
- **Policy Shift:** In 2015, it was notified that all thermal power plants must install FGD systems by 2017 to reduce SO₂ emissions. However, only about 8% of the plants have complied.
 - As per the new notification, **Only 11% of units (Category A)** located in densely populated areas or within **10 km of National Capital Region** are mandated to install FGD.
 - Another 11% (Category B) near critically polluted areas or non-attainment cities may be required to install FGD, depending on expert committee review.
- **Key Reasoning Behind Rollback:** A panel led by Principal Scientific Adviser stated that **Indian coal has low sulphur content** and that ambient SO₂ levels are already below permissible limits (10–20 µg/m³ vs 80 µg/m³ limit).
 - It also found **no significant difference in air quality between areas with or without FGD units.**
 - High installation costs, limited vendors, and delays due to Covid-19 were also cited as key reasons for exempting most thermal plants.
- **Expert Critique:** SO₂ contributes to fine [particulate matter \(PM_{2.5}\)](#), impacting health up to 200 km away. Lack of FGD could increase risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.
 - Tall chimneys only spread, not reduce, emissions. Coal combustion contributes around **15% of India's PM_{2.5} levels.**
 - The decision lacks public debate, sets location-based standards, and risks harming air quality and health.

Read more: [Reviewing FGD Rules for Coal Power Plants](#)

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