

How Is the UAE Improving Sand & Dust Storm Warnings?

The UAE has announced it will soon introduce a new early warning system for sand and dust storms (SDS), with the intention of giving vulnerable residents advance notice that an incident is imminent. This will allow them to deviate their transit routes away from the affected area, stay indoors or otherwise take evasive action, thus mitigating the impact of the extreme climate events on human health.

The policy is in keeping with the UAE's wider climate adaptation programme, which aims to put people front and centre when it comes to such issues. "Health is the human face of climate change," [explained Dr Nada al Marzouqi](#), director of the Department of Public Health and Prevention. "We cannot talk about climate change without putting health at the centre of discussions."

Deadly dust on the rise

Exposure to poor air quality is dangerous for anyone, but it can be particularly problematic for those with pre-existing pulmonary and cardiovascular illnesses. Asthma sufferers can experience an acute attack of the disease if exposed to high concentrations of dust, while it can exacerbate the condition of those suffering from chronic obstructive lung and heart issues.

Dust storms are on the rise across the Arab Gulf region. Last year, [an international study](#) co-authored by Abu Dhabi scientists found that manmade climate change was driving this heightened frequency. Airborne "rivers" of water vapour, which are more commonly found in warmer climates, were one of the main contributing factors to the phenomenon, but other symptoms of climate change – such as drought, melting polar icecaps and desiccated lakes – all played their part, too.

Although the UAE's robust medical infrastructure and expert healthcare services mean that it has one of the lowest incidences of respiratory diseases in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, it has been experiencing a spike in cases of late. It's for that reason that the Emirati government have decided to put in place the SDS early warning system.

Advance warning

The idea of giving Emirati citizens an advance warning of an impending SDS is nothing new. Indeed, the government have been putting out such warnings with undesirable regularity over recent years. However, the new system would be novel in that it would automatically update vulnerable residents of the potential dangers, thus safeguarding an at-risk segment of the population.

Although not yet in place, the system is expected to be unveiled very soon. It will be a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Prevention, the National Centre of Meteorology (NCM) and the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority. By involving these prominent bodies in their respective fields, the Ministry of Health can guarantee a system that is accurate, efficient and helpful to those who need it most.

The entire initiative is being implemented as it dovetails perfectly with the UAE's desire to foreground human health with regard to its climate policy. While planet Earth and the flora and fauna which depend upon it rightly occupy much of the dialogue when it comes to environmental issues, it must not be forgotten that the human race is very much a part of that ecosystem – and that our own wellbeing should be front and centre of any strategizing for a more sustainable future.