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City Air Found 7% Dirtier Than in '69

By DAVID BIRD

City officials conceded publicly for the first time yesterday that one of the key air pollutants here—suspended particulate matter, or dirt—had increased 7 per cent over the last three years despite stepped-up control efforts.

Previously the city had been emphasizing another air pollutant — sulphur dioxide, an irritating gas—that has been reduced 50 per cent over the last three years, mainly as a result of regulations requiring the burning of low-sulphur fuel.

The daily air-pollution index that the city's Department of Air Resources issues each afternoon, which classifies the air on a scale ranging from "good" to "unhealthy," does not include the readings on suspended particulates.

The index, therefore, has indicated that the air was getting better and better over the last few years. Yesterday, for example, air quality was reported as "good."

Index Being Reconsidered

But publisher reports of rising particulate readings has now led the city to reconsider the validity of the index it reports.

"Perhaps the combination of elements that make up that report will have to be adjusted in the light of what we are finding out now," said Jerome Kretchmer, the city's Environmental Protection Administrator, as a news conference yesterday.

Fred C. Hart, the Acting Commissioner of Air Resources, said he hoped to be able to expand the index to include such pollutants as nitrogen oxides as well as particulates.

Dr. Edward C. Ferrand, head of the department's Bureau of Technical Services, said a lack of accurate equipment had prevented the inclusion of all the relevant pollutants. By the end of the year, he said, he hopes to overcome this problem.

Asked if the index would have been the same if particulates had been weighed in the readings, Dr. Ferrand said, "Obviously not."

Mayor Lindsay, in campaigning in Florida for the Democratic Presidential nomination, has emphasized strongly what his administration has done to clean up New York City's air.

The Mayor has been telling audiences in Florida that the number of "unacceptable" or "unhealthy" days declined by two-thirds from 1969 to 1971. Thomas B. Morgan, the Mayor's press secretary, said the Mayor would revise his remarks if a new index indicated a different situation.

According to air resources officials, the adoption of a new index is unlikely for at least six months because of delays in getting equipment.

The city has been concentrating on reducing sulphur dioxide because, Mr. Kretchmer said, "In recent times the problem was thought to be sulphur dioxide. Now the problem seems to be particulates, and we'll move to solve that problem now."

There is concern about particulates because by 1975 the city will be required to meet a Federal air-quality standard of not more than 75 micrograms of suspended particulate matter a cubic meter of air. The average reading in the city was 98 in 1969 and it rose to 104 in 1971.

Although officials now recognize the particulate problem, they are not sure how to deal with it. Dirt in the air is a complex mix of everything from asbestos worn off automobile brake linings to soot from a faulty oil burner.

Commissioner Hart said measures to correct the particulate situation might be as severe as banning the use of oil burner in certain sections of the city. Buildings then would be required to use steam piped in for heat.

Although the city has made a sharp reduction in sulphur dioxide—from an average of eighth-hundredth parts a million parts of air in 1969 to four-hundredth parts a million last year—the Federal standard of three-hundredths still has not yet been reached. City officials are confident, however, that that standard can be met by the 1975 deadline with reduction of fuel sulphur content now mandated.

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