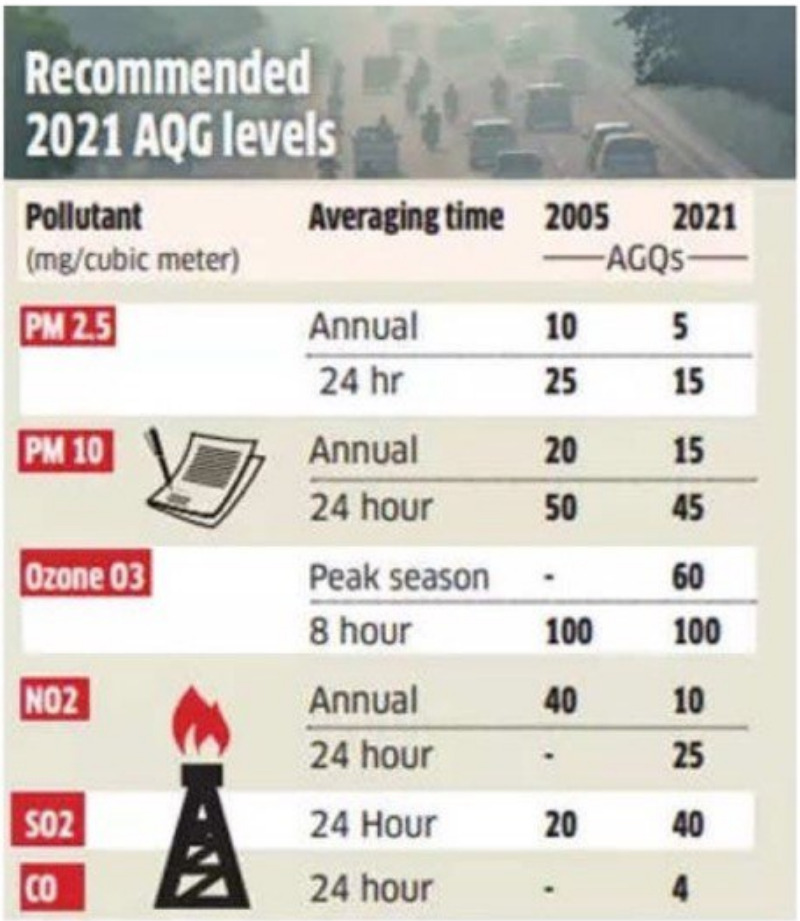
WHO tightens Global Air Quality norms

The (WHO) in its first-ever update since 2005 has tightened global air pollution standards.

Global Air Quality Guidelines (AQGs) 2021

- WHO announces limits for six pollutant categories –particulate matter (PM) 2.5 and 10, ozone (O3), (NO2) (SO2) and (CO).



Pollutant (mg/cubic meter)	Averaging time	2005 AQGs	2021 AQGs
PM 2.5	Annual	10	5
	24 hr	25	15
PM 10	Annual	20	15
	24 hour	50	45
Ozone O3	Peak season	-	60
	8 hour	100	100
NO2	Annual	40	10
	24 hour	-	25
SO2	24 Hour	20	40
CO	24 hour	-	4

Air quality standards in India

- India aligns with the WHO guidelines only in the case of ozone and carbon monoxide, as these have not changed.
- But both NO_2 and SO_2 guidelines are tighter than the current Indian standard.
- The move doesn't immediately impact India as the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) don't meet the WHO's existing standards.
- The government has a dedicated National Clean Air Programme that aims for a 20% to 30% reduction in particulate matter concentrations by 2024 in 122 cities, keeping 2017 as the base year.

Significance of WHO's AQG

It sets the stage for eventual shifts in policy

- WHO move sets the stage for eventual shifts in policy in the government towards evolving newer stricter standards.
- This will soon become part of policy discussions – much like climate targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions keep getting stricter over time.
- Once cities and States are set targets for meeting pollution emission standards, it could lead to overall changes in national standards.

Challenges for India

- The current challenge in India is to meet its national ambient air quality standards in all the regions.
- The hard lockdown phases during the pandemic have demonstrated the dramatic reduction that is possible when local

pollution and regional influences can be minimised.

- This has shown that if local action is strengthened and scaled up at speed across the region, significant reduction to meet a much tighter target is possible.
- The influence of geo-climatic attributes is quite pronounced in all regions of India, which further aggravates the local build-up of pollution.
- This is further worsened due to the rapid proliferation of pollution sources and weak air quality management systems.
- India may require a more nuanced regional approach to maximise benefits and sustain air quality gains.

* Meet targets to get air pollution funds

- National Clean Air Programme
  - target to reduce air pollution by 20-30% by 2024 with respect to 2017 levels in 102 of India's most polluted cities.
  - ₹4400 crore to be allocated in 2020-21
    By Centre → to States → Local Municipal Bodies
  - But Centre released only ₹2200 crore to 15 states → highest to Maha & UP
- Centre plans to link money disbursed to States achieving targets
- MoEF&CC → to set performance parameters
- 2nd installment of remaining ₹2200 crores
  ↳ to be on basis of performance
  ↳ in terms of Y-O-Y improvement in air quality
  ↳ will be released in Jan 2021

* The Pusa Decomposer

- The AQI rises to severe levels (400 or more)
  - ↳ in Delhi & NCR
  - ↳ makes air unbreathable
  - ↳ mainly due to burning of stubble in Punjab, Haryana & Delhi
- AQI (Air Quality Index)
  - ↳ based on amount of particle pollution in air & the associated generation of ozone, NO_2, SO_2, CO
  - ↳

AQI	Category
0-50	Good
51-100	Satisfactory
101-200	Moderates
201-300	Poor
301-400	Very Poor
401-500	Severe

- Slash & burn cultivation (Jhum)
  - ↳ also in NE India → Tripura, APS Meghalaya
  - ↳ here also Pusa Decomposer can be used.