



CASE STUDY

100 Days to Cleaner Air

Government action results in a 90 percent drop in ambient air lead levels



Photo: USAID

A research team monitors pollution from vehicles in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

“USAID has provided a remarkable amount of resources and global experiences through training,” says Secretary Don S. Jayaweera, Ministry of Transport. “This program accomplished several important achievements through hard work and setting ambitious targets to attain better air quality.”

Challenge

By 2001, the air quality in Sri Lanka’s major cities was deteriorating rapidly — largely due to pollution from vehicles using leaded gasoline. Even at low levels, lead exposure can affect brain development, reduce learning ability and cause behavioral disorders, especially in children. However, lead poisoning is also entirely preventable, and eliminating the use of leaded gasoline is a critical first step to reducing exposure on a wide scale. In June 2002, the Sri Lankan government launched the 100 Days Program, halting sales of leaded fuel countrywide. But it needed to provide evidence to policymakers and the public that the program would be effective and beneficial to keep up the momentum for additional measures to improve air quality.

Initiative

To support the 100 Days Program, USAID sponsored several initiatives, including one study measuring the impact of the lead phase out, and another identifying the country’s most polluting vehicles using state-of-the-art remote sensing technology. USAID also assisted the World Bank and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources in forming the Air Quality Management Center, which carries out nationwide emissions and fuel standards programs and implements campaigns to increase environmental awareness and communicate with the public.

Results

Ambient air lead levels dropped 90 percent as a result of the 100 Days Program. Buoyed by these results and its increased capacity to manage air quality, the Sri Lankan government is committed to taking further actions — mandating better vehicle maintenance practices, instituting a vehicle testing program and changing the policies on importing used and two-stroke vehicles. With the help of the Air Quality Management Center, proposed standards for emissions and inspections have now been crafted that will enable Sri Lanka to meet more stringent vehicle emission standards for both imported and in-use vehicles by 2007.