

Thailand takes major step towards open pollution data

Thursday 28 September 2023, by [Nicha Wachpanich](#) (Date first published: 31 August 2023).

In a significant move, a court has issued a mandate for the swift 60-day rollout of a pollution tracking system, known as the PRTR. But environmentalists are concerned it might be limited to only a few provinces.

BANGKOK - In a move toward greater environmental transparency, the Central Administrative Court ordered the Ministry of Industry on Tuesday to set up the Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) within two months. The system will track and publicise data on industrial pollution and hazardous chemical releases.

This decision comes on the heels of a 2022 lawsuit filed by seven environmental groups and individuals. The court ruled the National Environment Board (NEB) and two key ministries — the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Industry — failed to address the PM2.5 air quality crisis, even with plans in place.

Every year, from January to May, parts of Thailand, especially its central and northern regions, face high pollution levels. This is mainly due to agricultural burning and forest fires. Last March, Chiang Mai's pollution levels rose so high that it was dubbed [the world's most polluted city](#), surpassing even Mumbai.

Thailand's approach to managing air pollution, already strained, has been further complicated by industrial incidents. An explosion at a chemical facility near Bangkok in July 2021 starkly underscored the country's shortfalls in disseminating critical pollution data. This accident intensified concerns over toxic air spread and showed the lack of available pollution data to inform and prepare the public in case of emergency.

Civil society groups have long championed the creation of a public database, similar to the PRTR, taking cues from data collection systems in [the United States](#).

"The main purpose of the PRTR is to provide the public with easy access to information on the amount and types of pollutants from every source via a website aligned with the community right-to-know," said Penchom Saetang, the director of Ecological Alert and Recovery-Thailand, one of the plaintiffs. "Thailand should accelerate the implementation of the PRTR so that air pollution"

However, the court dismissed the environmentalists' calls to strengthen air quality standards for PM2.5 emissions originating from factories. Additionally, there is a growing concern among activists that the Ministry of Industry's PRTR proposal might be confined to just three test provinces. Given these limitations, many advocates are weighing an appeal and advocating for a [public-driven version](#) of PRTR.

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