

Vehicle emissions 'costing Arab nations \$5bn'

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Arab nations are spending more than \$5 billion to fight health problems caused by the pollution from vehicles, a top official has revealed.

Growing air pollution from the transport sector is leaving countries with a huge bill to pay, said Dr. Rashid Ahmed Bin Fahad, UAE Minister of Environment and Water.

He was speaking at the opening session of the EnviroCities 2008 International Conference on Tuesday organised jointly by Dubai Municipality and the Environment Centre for Arab Towns in cooperation with the Harvard School of Public Health.

Quoting a report titled "Arab Environment: Future Challenges," the minister said Arab countries suffered hugely from the impacts of both primary and secondary air pollutants that led to an increase in respiratory diseases, skin diseases and eye-infections, news agency WAM reported.

"Its impact has not just been limited to human health alone, but it has also affected agricultural lands, forests, water channels, and marine environment," he said.

"Some of the lakes in our countries have turned into acid quagmires and been rendered unlivable due to high pollution levels. The economy has also suffered a lot in the shape of a gradual destruction in infrastructure, electrical installations, iron structures etc," the minister added.

He said the risks from growing pollution levels in the UAE, underscored the need to develop laws, for controlling emissions.

"We should also adopt most modern techniques in the monitoring, controlling and managing air pollution, and conduct more in-depth researches and studies to identify the health, social and economic impact of air pollution so that decision makers can rely on them for the future plans," he said.

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