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## Smoke signals

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### **‘Number of Pollution Under Control (PUC) certificates issued abysmally low against number of new vehicles registered’**

The number of vehicles turning up at pollution check centres across Karnataka to obtain Pollution Under Control (PUC) certification has only marginally increased over the last five years, according to official data shared by Karnataka’s transport department.

As per statistics, the department issued close to 41 lakh PUC certificates in 2018, around 69 lakh in 2019, a little over 66 lakh in 2020 whereas 73 lakh PUC certificates were issued in 2021.

By June 2022, the total number of certificates issued was around 41 lakh.

Experts BM spoke to said the number of PUC certificates being issued is still abysmally low when compared to the number of new vehicles registered.

As of March 31, 2022, the state recorded a total of over 2.8 crore transport and non-transport vehicles registrations. While over 15.75 lakh vehicles were registered in 2019-20, 11.56 lakh new vehicles were registered in 2020-21 and 11.50 lakh in 2021-22.

“Calculating the exact number of vehicles with PUC is difficult as some vehicles might have active PUC for a certain period. Also, many vehicles being registered in Bengaluru for instance might not be plying here. However, if you match the number of PUC certificates issued with the RTO registration record, this is very low,” said Dr Ashish Verma of the Sustainable Transportation Lab at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc). An inconsiderable rise in the PUC certificates being issued by the state despite the amendment to the Motor Vehicles Act in 2019, which fixed a higher penalty amount for an outdated PUC certificate, is a cause of concern as well, according to experts.

Notably, the Karnataka government had slashed the penalties for traffic violations under the amended Motor Vehicle Act of 2019, including for vehicles without permits. While the penalty for violation of permit

condition was Rs 10,000 under the amended act, it was dropped to Rs 5,000 after public demand.

“Even after the government slashed the penalty by half, the amount is still higher than in the pre-amendment era. The fine amount should act as a probable deterrent,” said another city based mobility expert.

Mobility advocates are of the view that the onus lies on corruption-free and technology-driven enforcement of the mandatory requirement. “While the penalty amount set by the government is a good deterrent, a continuous mechanism for checking the vehicles for PUC certificate is the need of the hour. Unless there is a robust round-the-clock mechanism and technology based enforcement concerning how violations are recorded and penalised, tailpipe emission will be difficult to control,” said Dr Verma.

Avijit Michael, executive director of Jhatkaa.org, was in agreement and told BM that there are many vehicles that are not obtaining PUC certificates and orders should be given to traffic police to check the certificate more strictly.

“PUC certificate rule must be enforced in its true spirit to ensure a reduction in tailpipe emissions. The traffic police must be more vigilant with a technology driven approach to crack the whip on defaulters,” Michael told BM.