

The air quality in Sabac has dropped in 2020 compared to the previous two years, according to data from the Sabac Public Health Institute, which the BBC had insight into. One of the biggest problems is soot, whose permitted concentrations in 2018 were exceeded for 18 days, the following year for 56, and in 2020 for as many as 180 days. Smog, the smell of soot and the opaque white cataract that covers the sky have not been a rare sight in cities from the north to the south of Serbia for years - a country that has an infamous black dot status in Europe in international air quality reports.

Although the air in Sabac - a city with almost 54,000 inhabitants and two industrial zones, of which the northwest is the largest along with Serbia - was not an exception among the places that have problems with air pollution in previous years, locals are especially worried about air quality this winter. "Has color" and the smell of "something sour."

Why is the air in Sabac polluted?

In the past six years, Sabac has experienced great economic development - the number of companies in the city increased from 796 to 1,100 between 2013 and 2020 - including several new factories - which brought the city more than ten thousand new jobs. In 2019 alone, 14 new factories were opened. In addition, several factories have opened new plants, including the largest manufacturer of ceramic tiles in Serbia - Zorka Keramika. The industrial zone in the city was formed after the First World War, then a few kilometers from the city.

In the meantime, the city has expanded, so that today, officially the largest industrial zone in Serbia, over time, it has become tucked away among residential areas. Thus, the industrial district that feeds the city has become a "problem for Sabac", according to the local branch of the environmental organization Eco Guard.

"We believe that the city Bureau should change the network of measuring stations, because the stations are located in remote places in the city and do not register pollution in the best possible way," points out Dejan Pavlović from the non-governmental organization European Ecological Center.

The women from Šapče, who held a protest in mid-February due to air pollution, see the main culprit for this situation in the fertilizer factory Elikzir Zorka, one of the largest in the city. Their eyes are especially stung by the factory chimney, from which, as they claim, "big smoke billows every day".

However, the Elikzir Zorka factory points out that there were no exceedances of harmful substances on an annual basis, with the exception of "rare and short-term" daily overruns. The competent inspection of the Ministry of Environmental Protection did not answer the

BBC's questions about the results of the supervision over the work of this company.

What do they say from the factory?

Although the measurements performed by accredited laboratories twice a year did not exceed the emission of harmful substances into the air, Elixir points out that they have already recognized the need for additional filters. The daily measurements they perform themselves have shown that there are deviations on a daily basis, which are "rare and short-lived", it is stated in the written answer to the BBC's questions.

"Two scrubber-filters of large capacity for rinsing and purification of gases are being made." These filters are "used to wash gases, reducing the concentration of ammonia, fluorophenols, hydrogen chloride and powder," before being released into the air through a factory chimney, Elixir explains. The factory already has seven built-in scrubber filters for air purification, as well as six bag filters that "retain powdery substances". In addition, Elixir uses additional technology in which cyclone gas is used to remove powdery substances. They point out that the prescribed production volume of a maximum of 300,000 tons has not been exceeded by anyone during the past three years, since when the citizens have been complaining about the increased pollution in the city.

What kind of air do the citizens of Sabac breathe?

The air quality in Sabac has significantly deteriorated over the past three years, and especially last year - 2020, according to data submitted by the City Institute for Public Health in Sabac at the request of the BBC. One of the biggest problems is soot - a mixture of ash, soot, dust and other particles that are released during combustion. In the last three years, the concentration of soot in the air has noticeably increased, and in 2020 it was exceeded in 180 days, which is almost half of the calendar year. This year, the concentration of soot in the air in January was exceeded "on average about 15 days a month," say the Institute. In the last three years, since citizens began to self-organize due to pollution, the amount of PM2.5 and PM10 particles in city air While no daily exceedances were recorded for these particles in 2018, in 2019 PM10 particles were exceeded for seven days, in 2020 as many as 29 days, and from the beginning of 2021 in eight days.

Source: bbc.com