

North Macedonia's government said it's imposing emergency measures in the country's capital, Skopje, and three other cities in order to protect people from severely high levels of **air pollution**.

No sports events will be staged Sunday or on any day with high **air pollution** levels, and other outdoor activities will be curtailed. Starting Monday, construction work will be limited to a six-hour period, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The **government** has recommended companies excuse pregnant women and people over age 60 from work.

The government also said it would reduce the use of its official vehicles by half and ordered the health and welfare ministries to provide shelter for homeless people and boost emergency **services** and home visits to people with **chronic illnesses**.

The measures were announced Saturday after days of lobbying by environmental groups asking the government to act. The new rules coincided with an announcement by IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company, ranking **North Macedonia's** capital as the third-most **polluted city** in the world for Saturday after Kyrgyzstan capital Bishkek and Lahore, Pakistan. The levels of toxic PM10 and PM 2.5 particles in the air measured by IQAir in Skopje were about 28 times higher than the safety threshold established by the **World Health Organization**.

PM10 particles are particles smaller than 10 micrometers, or 10 one-millionths of a meter that are so-called coarse particles that can irritate the eyes, nose and throat. PM2.5 particles can lodge deeper into the lungs, enter the bloodstream and are considered more dangerous.

North Macedonia has been one of Europe's most **polluted** countries for years. Health authorities estimate that more than 3,000 people in this country of just over 2 million die each year as a result of **air pollution**, which is mostly a result of the heavy use of household wood-burning stoves during cold winters, an aging car fleet and the practice in some areas of garbage disposal by incineration.

The recent spike in energy prices has further boosted wood-burning stove use, VoA reports.