



CONTACT: Angel Hsu, Yale University
angel.hsu@yale.edu
203 432 5594

YALE AND COLUMBIA EXPERTS ADDRESS AIR QUALITY COMPARISONS IN THE 2014 ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE INDEX

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is a biennial ranking of how countries perform on high-priority environmental issues. Reports in the international media have implied that the 2014 EPI compares air quality in major world cities, notably New Delhi and Beijing. However, the EPI does not rank cities, nor do the air quality data in the EPI provide any information on city-level environmental performance.

The research teams at Yale and Columbia universities are committed to synthesizing scientifically sound data that reveal differences in environmental performance at the national level. The goal of the EPI is to seek out the most appropriate data for each of the world's most pressing environmental concerns. In the case of air quality, the 2014 EPI utilized satellite data as processed by a team of atmospheric chemists and remote sensing experts. These data permit robust comparison across all nations. On some indicators, India emerged as having air quality worse or as bad as China's, which fueled questions about how air quality compares in the two capital cities.

“Through the EPI indicators and rankings, we hope to spur conversation about how to improve environmental performance. While we would prefer to make more local comparisons at the sub-national levels, the reality is that these data do not exist,” said lead author Angel Hsu. “There is no substitute for reliable, timely, local-level air quality measurements. It is precisely the absence of a global network of such data that forces us to rely on satellite data,” added Hsu.

An accurate comparison of air quality in any two cities requires data from consistently calibrated ground stations. Beijing reports data on fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) concentration on an hourly basis over a publicly accessible platform. New Delhi's reporting is not as consistent or transparent, making direct comparison impossible. New Delhi may or may not have dirtier air than Beijing, but it is clearly behind in how it makes air quality information available to its citizens.

Improving public health and the vitality of the environment will require decisionmakers to be committed to rigorous monitoring and reporting standards.

“We believe strongly in the right of access to environmental information. Everyone deserves to know the quality of the air they breathe. If we could fulfill this right, we could definitively say how cities in the world compare,” said co-author Marc Levy of Columbia University.

More details on the 2014 EPI, including in depth discussion of the air quality indicators, are available at <http://epi.yale.edu>.