

Chile Declares Environmental State of Emergency



Santiago de Chile, June 22 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Chile declared an environmental state of emergency in the capital Santiago de Chile on Monday, due to extreme levels of smog.

“Currently, we are facing unusual conditions, with one of the driest months, June, in more than 40 years, as well as poor air circulation conditions recorded in the Santiago Basin in recent days, which have increased the concentration of (air) pollutants,” the nation's environmental ministry said in a statement released early Monday. The ministry stated emergency measures are now in place, including forced shutdowns of more than 900 industrial sites, though details of which businesses have been forced to close are yet to be made public. The government also plans to take steps to remove as many as 1.7 million vehicles from the city's roads.

“We call for people to respect the measures to help reduce the pollution,” the ministry stated. Santiago has long struggled with some of the country's highest levels of air pollution. The entire city is contained within the Santiago Basin – a valley sandwiched between the Andes and a smaller mountain range. During periods of low rainfall or limited wind, the basin has a tendency to trap air pollution.

Monday's measures are the first since 1999 when an environmental emergency was declared in the city. Although the state of emergency is currently set only to remain in place for 24 hours, the government could extend the emergency period longer if conditions don't improve.

Among the measures is a recommendation from the environmental ministry for Santiago residents to avoid outdoor exercise. The advisory is aimed at limiting the public's exposure to tiny particulate matter known as PM2.5, which can get lodged in lungs and cause a myriad of health issues.

However, the ministry's recommendation could prove controversial, as the city is currently hosting the Copa America soccer tournament.

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