

Stubble Fire Down 32%; Punjab Sees 30% Dip

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New Delhi: There has been a 32% decrease in stubble fire counts so far in 2022, compared to 2021, according to latest data by the Central government. The data so far also indicates the lowest Air Quality Index (AQI) for Delhi-NCR since 2018 and possibly the least pollution levels during Diwali.

In the eye of the storm, Punjab has recorded a 30% drop in stubble fires so far while Haryana has shown a 48% decline. Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have reported a 67% and 33% fall in farm fires.

In total, from 77,967 farm fire counts recorded in the peak stubble burning season in 2021 — between September 15 and November 22 — the figures is down to 53,227 this year.

The key reason is that the biggest contributor to farm fire related air pollution in Delhi-NCR — Punjab — has shown a significant improvement in 2022 compared to the last few years, latest data indicates.

From a staggering 71,090 stubble fire events in 2021 between September 15 and November 22, the state has recorded 49,604 farm fires in 2022 during the same period. The figure was over 76,000 in 2020.

This is a significant drop con-

sidering that the area under paddy cultivation had increased in Punjab this year sparking fears of an even bigger stubble management problem.

September estimates in central government reviews had shown the area under paddy cultivation in Punjab was up from 29.61 lakh hectares in 2021 to 31.44 lakh hectares in 2022. Consequently, overall straw generated in Punjab probably touched 19.99 million tonnes in 2022 vis a vis 18.74 million tonnes in 2021 — throwing a big challenge.

Punjab had, however, maintained that it would reduce stubble fires by half this year. While that target may not have been achieved, the 30% fall is a much-needed relief.

Haryana has done well on stubble management in 2022 with a 48% decrease in stubble fires — from 6,733 in the Sept 15 to Nov 22 period in 2021, the figure is at 3,522 in 2022.

Uttar Pradesh's NCR districts have reported a 33% decline in stubble fires — from 137 in 2021 to 91 in 2022. Rajasthan had reported three fire counts in 2021 and is down to one this year. Delhi, though it has very small agricultural holdings, reported an increase — from four cases of farm fires to 9 in the same period. The decrease in stubble fires seems to be reflected in the AQI in Delhi-NCR this season.