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University promotes better masks to combat pollution scourge

THE NATION

CHIANG MAI University's Faculty of Medicine yesterday handed out a more protective type of face mask, the N95, to help its staff cope with serious air pollution.

The distribution of 6,000 N95 masks was also aimed at raising public awareness of the problem and at educating people about how to protect their health.

"Air pollution now is at its worst in three decades," the faculty's dean, Professor Bannakij Lojanapiwat, said yesterday.

An N95 mask covers the nose and mouth of its wearers, protecting them from inhaling some hazardous substances, including small particles. It is designed to filter out at least 95 per cent of the dust and mould in the air.

Bannakij said as his faculty was a health leader in the country, particularly in the North, it had made it a mission to help people during the smog crisis.

"We are unable to control air quality in our town. But at the very least, we should learn to protect ourselves as best we can," he said. "If you wear a normal mask, it can't block out very small particles. You now should go for the N95 if you go outdoors".

Bannakij added that when air quality dropped this badly, people definitely should not exercise outdoors.

According to www.airvisual.com, Chiang Mai yesterday ranked among

the 10 worst big cities in terms of air quality, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) standing at 148. When AQI ranges between 101 and 150, the air is considered unhealthy for sensitive groups.

Assoc-Professor Arintaya Phrommintikul, who teaches at the Chiang Mai University Faculty of Medicine, said the number of patients admitted to hospitals with lung and heart problems increased everytime the amount of dust particles soared.

"Dust can trigger symptoms," she said.

The university's Faculty of Science is also distributing facial masks.

Chiang Mai is not the only province suffering from air pollution in Thailand. [Airvisual.com](http://airvisual.com) showed

Bangkok's AQI was 161 yesterday.

When AQI ranges between 151 and 200, everyone may begin to experience health effects, with members of sensitive groups at risk of experiencing more serious effects.