

Purifiers help many urban residents breathe more easily while at home

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By Wang Zhuoqiong (China Daily USA)

In an attempt to stop her family from breathing polluted air, Christina Wang, the mother of a 3-month-old in Beijing, bought her second air purifier in two months.

"We put one in the living room and another in the baby's room," said Wang.

She said she shuts all the windows and washes her hands, face and nose every time she returns home.

Wang is among many people grappling with persistent smog in huge urban clusters in North and East China, where people are rushing to buy products to purify the air.

Most of the air purifiers at a Beijing supermarket run by Carrefour SA were sold out when a China Daily reporter stopped by.

"Most of the purchases are for household use," said a store manager, who declined to be identified.

"Sales of air purifiers doubled from the same period last year. We're introducing more brands to meet rising demand."

In the past week, sales of air purifiers in severely affected cities including Beijing and Tianjin grew 500 percent, compared with the previous week when the smog was not serious, according to Suning Commerce Group Co Ltd, a leading home appliance retailer.

According to China Market Monitor Co Ltd, sales of air purifiers last year reached 2.4 million units, up 90.5 percent year-on-year. In value terms, sales grew 106 percent to 5.6 billion yuan (\$918 million).

Air purifiers offering multiple layers of filters have become more popular. Sales of those with five layers were up 191 percent, according to China Monitor.

Foreign brands account for more than 80 percent of the market. Those priced between 1,000 yuan and 3,000 yuan are most popular.

The company has forecast that sales of air purifiers will reach 3.6 million units this year, with a retail value of 9 billion yuan.

Smog levels in northern China have worsened in the past year. The problem is now affecting East and even South China, said Hua Chunmu, corporate communications manager of 3M China Ltd.

Hua said the smog has pushed up sales of related products ranging from masks to air purifiers.

3M offers masks for industrial use through its store on Tmall, a leading B2C website. It's selling 40,000 to 50,000 daily. Hua said that even though the company increased production capacity, it can't keep up with demand.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, growth in air purifier sales has been accelerating. Sales rose 11.4 percent in 2010 but, by the third quarter of 2012, growth stood at 14.7 percent.

The ministry has forecast that growth will run at about 15 percent annually in the coming years.

Honeywell International Inc said revenue from selling air purifiers in China, mostly for commercial buildings, has grown 50 percent annually on average

500
percent

the growth of air purifier sales at Suning Commerce Group Co Ltd in its stores in major cities in northern China in the past week

in the past three years.

Further growth is expected, according to Ling Zhen, the company's regional director for residential and environmental sales.

The penetration rate of air purifiers in China is still just 1 percent, offering a massive potential market for industry players.

Urbanization is providing opportunities as well, given the increasing public awareness of air and water quality issues, Ling said.

Honeywell is considering the development of retail networks in China, including a presence on Tmall, said Li Ning, vice-president and general manager of Honeywell Life Safety Asia.

He said most sales of their masks are generated in North China and East China, with revenue growth exceeding that of industrial products.



Customers choose masks from a nearly empty shelf at a store in Beijing on Wednesday. Masks and air purifiers have been flying off the shelves in the capital because of heavy air pollution that began to shroud the city from early last week. Liu Zhe / China Daily

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