

《Smog costs add up quickly》

China is investing billions of yuan to combat air pollution. The government has set a target of reducing air pollutants by more than 10% by 2017, compared with 2012's levels. But while the country spends heavily on solving the problem, individuals are also using their hard-earned cash to protect themselves from smog.

On days when the AQI soars above 150, it's unwise to exercise outdoors as those nasty PM2.5 particles can be sucked deep into the lungs. Gyms present a viable alternative to those looking to stay in shape.

"Because of the smog, I have problems breathing when exercising outside. Now I train here, where the equipment and air are better."

"Exercising outside when there is smog can be harmful to your health. We breathe harder during exercise, which means we'll get more PM2.5 particles and other air pollutants into our systems. It can clog the nose and suffocate us," Personal trainer H+ Fitness Express Luo Lin said.

I am one of those who are too scared to exercise outside because of air pollution. And a typical gym membership can easily cost 300 yuan per month. But it is not the only possible extra cost people are bearing nowadays. Some of them are going one step further and buying air purifiers.

"I am considering to get an air purifier due to air pollution."

"Air purifier sales have jumped drastically in Shanghai. Nationwide, there is a 20 to 30% increase in demand for air purifiers," Sale manager with Suning Changning Store Chu Liangliang said.

Chu also says on days when the AQI approaches or breaks 200, a level considered heavily polluted, they can sell more than 70 air purifiers in just one store, compared to about half that amount on regular days. But they are not cheap, ranging from 3,000 yuan to more than 10,000 yuan. The filters in air purifiers also need to be changed regularly, adding another 100 yuan to the monthly bills.

Of course, no one can stay inside all the time to avoid pollution. So when heading outdoors, masks are the most common way to protect ourselves from the harmful effects of smog. While seemingly inexpensive, the cost does add up.

"The principal behind a mask is that it filters air pollutants and stops them from getting into our body. But the capacity is limited, so they need to be changed more frequently when used in heavy smog. At the same time, they can be used for longer when it's lightly polluted," Dr. ZHao Zuohui, associate professor with Fudan University, said.

Doctors recommend switching to a new mask after 24 hours of use when there is heavy smog. For me? I use two

masks per week, which costs around 40 yuan per month. Another addition to my monthly spending. Speaking of which, I should put my mask back on right now.

Demand for masks continues to grow. When Beijing issued a red alert for smog last month, daily online sales jumped 9 times compared to November, when the sky was clearer, according to an AliHealth report. In 2014, Beijing, Jiangsu and Shanghai were the top three markets for masks.

Add it all up and smog adds an extra 450 yuan to monthly expenses, or more than 5% of the average salary in China's first-tier cities.

