In India, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 established the right of the government to set vehicular emission standards. That law stipulates that an Indian state's Pollution Control Board (SPCB) may "lay down, in consultation with the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and having regard to the standards for the quality of air laid down by the CPCB, standards for emission of air pollutants into the atmosphere from industrial plants and automobiles or for the discharge of any air pollutant into the atmosphere from any other source whatsoever not being a ship or an aircraft…" The law also gave states the right to inspect, examine and enforce air quality regulations set by their Pollution Control Boards. The Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 authorized the central government to regulate much of what previously had been in the realm of individual states.

Starting with Supreme Court rulings in the late 1980's and 1990's, India began to take the first steps towards mitigating the public health impacts of vehicle and fuel emissions. The initial steps consisted of eliminating lead in petrol, switching to compressed natural gas (CNG) for autorickshaws and buses in Delhi and, subsequently, other cities, and establishing Euro 1/I equivalent emission standards known as India-1 standards for new vehicles.

India has since progressively lowered its permissible vehicular pollution emission limits for new four-wheeled vehicles following the path laid out by the European Union by adopting parallel "Bharat" standards. The Auto Fuel Policy of 2003 laid down a road map for vehicular emission and fuel quality standards for the remainder of the new century's first decade. This road map has been largely implemented. In 2010, Bharat IV fuel quality standards and vehicle emission standards for four-wheeled vehicles were implemented in 13 major cities, while Bharat III standards took effect in the rest of the country. By January 2013, Bharat IV standards had been expanded to about 10 more cities, most of which are along fuel supply routes. A total of 50-60 cities are planned to have Bharat IV standards by 2015. For two and three-wheelers, India followed an independent path and regulated emissions in a different

manner than Europe and China.