

# *Asian Dust, Yellow Sand, HwangSa*

*By Monte D. Hargrave, Registered Nurse*

Welcome to Korea... or welcome back to Korea. Many of you have first-hand experience or have heard second-hand about the air quality in Korea. 14-million people gathered in one area are bound to create some sort of pollution; in Seoul, air pollution is the most obvious. Some days are better than others, and it is comparable to conditions experienced in some of the major cities in the United States. We may already be familiar with air pollution & Ozone Warnings if we have lived in large metropolitan areas, but here in Korea, and many parts of Asia, we experience a weather phenomenon called HwangSa also referred to as Yellow Sand or Asian Dust.

As the name infers, the air is filled with dust and other pollutants carried up from Mongolia and China and brought to East, South and Southeast Asia by the jet stream and winds created by the weather patterns beginning late February/early March through May. Asian dust has an interesting history dating back to 174 A.D. and is available at <http://web.kma.go.kr/eng/weather/asiandust/intro.jsp> .

There are many things that have proven successful in combating the problems associated with Asian Dust. As for a normal, healthy member of USFK, the dust should pose little concern. If someone is associated with any of the following categories: the elderly, young children, people with lung diseases (such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, pneumonia), heart disease or diabetes, education and avoidance is the key to getting through the dust plume with minimal discomfort. Some tips for everyone include:

- Stay indoors if possible; avoidance is key
- Keep windows and doors closed
- Remove contact lenses; wear glasses
- Brush your teeth; wash your hands, face and eyes with warm water upon returning indoors
- Wash your hands before eating or handling food
- Drink plenty of water to keep you well hydrated & your tears flowing
- Use air filters &/or a humidifier to keep air clear and moist to improve comfort
- Wash fruits and vegetables exposed to yellow sand before consumption
- Don't burn candles or spray aerosols
- Don't smoke indoors
- Vacuum or dust off outer garments, shoes, purses, backpacks and clothing before storing them in a closet with clean clothes
- Dust, wash, vacuum or avoid pets that go in & out of the home
- If you must be outdoors, you may want to invest in a mask or other barrier. Masks commonly seen worn by locals are readily available at many stores and may help reduce exposure density to the irritants.

As with any condition that can make us ill, it is up to you to use good judgment and exercise proper risk vs. benefit decisions before heading out during an Asian Dust plume. Some of us will never notice it is there, while others may be hindered by it. Being armed with a little knowledge might just help you avoid being miserable later... make good choices and I'll see you while you are enjoying the "Assignment of Choice" the next few months.

To contact the Area II Preventive Medicine office about Asian Dust, call 736-6693 or 736-3033. The following sites also have information on Asian Dust:

**65<sup>th</sup> Medical Brigade link for Asian Dust:** <http://www.korea.amedd.army.mil/webapp/yellowSand/Default.asp>

**USFK Weather Page:** <http://www.usfk.mil/usfk/weather-yellowsand>

**Korean Metrologic Agency site:** <http://web.kma.go.kr/eng/weather/asiandust/forecastchart.jsp>

**Air Quality in CONUS:** <http://www.airnow.gov/>

**KoreaAir Real Time Air Quality Report Website:** <http://www.airkorea.or.kr/airkorea/eng/realtime/main.jsp>

**USFK link for Asian Dust conditions:** <http://web.kma.go.kr/eng/weather/asiandust/forecastchart.jsp>

Please visit our web-page <http://www.korea.amedd.army.mil/HealthPromotion/index.html> to find out more about Health Promotions.