

Fraud in construction linked to pollution

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Chinese officials are blaming fraudulent project approval procedures and slow construction of pollution control facilities for increased pollution.

China's environmental chief, Zhou Shengxian, notes more than 1,500 factories in southern China have been closed during the past three years due to the pollution and environmental hazards.

At the same time, pollution discharges increased in 17 provinces during the first six months of this year, Xinhua, China's official news service, reported.

Sulfur dioxide emissions increased 5.8 percent from January to June compared with the same period last year, despite government pledges to reduce emissions 2 percent by the end of the year.

"It is clear the conflict between economic growth and environmental protection is coming to a head," Zhou said. "Fraud in project approval was prominent, with many projects passing their environmental assessment without fulfilling the necessary criteria."

China discharged 25.49 million tons of sulfur dioxide last year, making it the world's top polluter of the substance, Xinhua said, noting nearly 85 percent of the emissions came from industrial sources, mostly large coal-burning projects.

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