

## China: Will ensure stimulus protects environment

June 5 2009, By HENRY SANDERSON , Associated Press Writer

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(AP) -- China said Friday it will strictly monitor the government's economic stimulus package for projects that cause pollution, addressing worries that officials would ignore the environment in an effort to maintain China's high economic growth rates.

The stimulus will not damage the environment, Ministry of Environmental Protection Vice Minister Zhang Lijun told a news conference.

China's 4 trillion yuan (\$586 billion) stimulus package was unveiled last November to boost domestic demand during the [global financial crisis](#).

Zhang said only projects concerning infrastructure and improving public welfare will get approval for fast-track environmental assessments - meaning everything else will be subject to a more rigorous assessment.

The environmental ministry has approved 365 projects related to the stimulus since last year and rejected or postponed 29 high-energy ones, such as petrochemical plants, steel factories and coal-powered [power plants](#), he said.

A total of 210 billion yuan (\$30.7 billion) of the stimulus money is earmarked for environmental protection projects and improving energy efficiency.

Zhang said less than one-tenth of the 230 billion yuan (\$33.8 billion) the

central government spent of the stimulus in the fourth quarter of last year and the beginning of this year went to that.

"The government's endeavors to stimulate domestic demand and stimulate economic growth will have little effect on our [environmental protection](#) efforts," Zhang said.

Still, he warned that some regions in China are still building projects without getting the required approval from environmental authorities. He did not give any details.

Environmental problems in China's vast rural areas are "increasingly acute," he said.

"The environmental situation in China remains tough, the surface water pollution is serious, the [coastal waters](#) across the country are slightly polluted, and in some cities air pollution is still serious," he said.

Still, measures to control pollution have been strengthened as seen in lower levels of some pollutants this year, Zhang said.

A measure of sulfur dioxide, an air pollutant that causes acid rain, fell 4.9 percent in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period a year earlier, and chemical oxygen demand, a measure of water pollution, fell 2.9 percent.

"What we can see is a continued momentum of decline," Zhang said.

The government set targets to cut chemical oxygen demand and emissions of sulfur dioxide by 10 percent between 2006 to 2010, and officials have said China will meet the goals.

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Citation: China: Will ensure stimulus protects environment (2009, June 5) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-06-china-stimulus-environment.html>

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