

Chinese growth threatened by pollution: minister

February 28 2011, by Dan Martin



The sun rises over eastern Beijing's developing skyline amid a murky layer of pollutants. Dire pollution and the gobbling of resources have caused China grave environmental problems and could restrain economic growth if not addressed properly, the environment minister said.

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In a strongly worded warning, Minister of Environment Protection Zhou Shengxian also said social stability -- a key concern of the government -- was at risk by recurring pollution-related public health scares.

"In China's thousands of years of civilisation, the conflict between humankind and nature has never been as serious as it is today," he said in

an essay on the ministry's website.

"The depletion, deterioration and exhaustion of resources and the worsening ecological environment have become bottlenecks and grave impediments to the nation's economic and social development," he said.

He said authorities would set up an "[air pollution](#) and [climate change](#) risk assessment system" and may factor global warming risks into how they assess new development projects such as factories.

"We will pay a painful price and even cause irrecoverable losses if... we are numb and apathetic when facing the acute conflict between humankind and nature," he said.

China -- which in November admitted it is the world's biggest [greenhouse gas](#) emitter -- has some of the globe's worst air and water quality after three decades of unrestrained growth and resulting pollution.

The world's second-largest economy has invested billions of dollars in environmental clean-up but has repeatedly refused to cap or cut emissions outright.

China says that as a developing country it should be given more leeway on emissions.

China has instead pledged to reduce [energy consumption](#) per unit of GDP, or carbon intensity, by 40-45 percent from 2005 levels by 2020 -- essentially a vow of greater [energy efficiency](#).

However, the country's energy appetite continues to grow, with consumption last year rising 5.9 percent from 2009 to the equivalent of 3.25 billion tonnes of coal, official data showed.

China relies on carbon-belching coal for about 70 percent of its energy needs.

Since 2009, major poisoning incidents linked to pollution have repeatedly occurred.

Last month 28 children, including some babies, were rushed to hospital in the eastern province of Anhui with lead poisoning caused by a local battery factory.

Reports earlier this month said up to 10 percent of rice grown in [China](#) may be tainted with heavy metals.

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