

Minister: China pollution remains 'very serious'

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(AP) -- Pollution in China remains very serious as the country's rapid economic growth brings on new environmental problems, with nearly 1,000 contamination incidents in the last five years, a minister said Saturday.

Vice environment minister Zhang Lijun said China has made progress on environmental protection, but acknowledged that its double-digit economic growth over the past decade has had negative impacts on the environment.

"Our rapid economic development has continuously brought our country new environmental problems, particularly [dangerous chemicals](#), electronic waste and so on. These [environmental pollutants](#) bring new problems and impact human health," Zhang told a news conference on the sidelines of the annual session of the National People's Congress, China's legislature.

He said that emissions of traditional pollutants remain high and some areas have failed to meet government targets.

China has pledged to continue reducing emissions this year of three key [air pollutants](#) - ammonia nitrogen, [sulfur dioxide](#) and nitrogen oxide. The government has also promised to bring down demand for chemical oxygen - a measure of [water pollution](#) - by 1.5 percent from the 2010 levels.

In the last five years, there were 912 "environmental emergencies" involving heavy metal pollution, including several well-publicized instances of mass contamination, Zhang said. Thousands of children were affected by lead poisoning in several provinces in 2009 and 2010 because they lived near metal smelters or battery factories.

Other incidents included a diesel fuel leak in the Yellow River, chemical contamination in the northeast Songhua River following a flood, and crude oil leakage off the northeastern coastal city of Dalian after a pipeline burst.

The minister noted that anticipated rapid urbanization in the next five years underscores the need for China to improve environmental protection and to shift to a more sustainable model of economic development from its reliance on energy-intensive industries.

China is focusing on clean energy generation, including solar, hydropower, wind and nuclear, as one way to reduce its reliance on coal, which generates three-quarters of its electricity and also fuels centralized winter heating systems in northern cities. China also hopes the strategy will reduce surging demand for imported oil and gas and boost economic growth and jobs.

Zhang told reporters that there was no plan to adjust China's overall strategy for nuclear development but he said that Beijing will look to Japan to learn lessons after a massive earthquake Friday resulted in a radioactive leak.

"Some lessons we learn from Japan will be considered in the making of China's nuclear power plans," he said. "But [China](#) will not change its determination and plan for developing nuclear power."

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