

China seen facing uphill struggle against pollution

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China's newly announced measures to combat pollution by slashing emissions from major polluting industries and holding local officials responsible could take 18 years to bring air quality within acceptable standards, analysts said Monday.

The problem of air pollution has stoked popular discontent across the country, with levels of particulate matter in Beijing measured at 40 times above [World Health Organization](#) limits this year.

The measures announced by the State Council, including holding local officials responsible for air quality, and reducing emissions from key polluting industries by 30 percent within five years, amount to a "milestone in the country's anti-pollution campaign", Deutsche Bank said in a report.

But the bank cautioned that efforts to improve air quality "could last for 18 years, before Chinese cities' average PM2.5 falls to 30". PM2.5 is a measure of tiny [particulate matter](#) which causes smog and breathing problems.

Ma Jun, director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, one of China's best-known environmental [advocacy groups](#), said the measures announced late Friday were "a response to [public concerns](#)", but cautioned that "it will be a huge challenge to put the measures into action".

"The main reason (for pollution) is that the local governments protect polluting industries for the sake of GDP," he said.

While China has long pledged to improve its environment, local officials are incentivised to rank economic growth above pollution reduction.

The new measures, which include a pledge to give local leaders targets for improving air quality, could provide them with "new motivation" to reduce pollution, Ma said, adding: "its not clear how important the [environmental goals](#) are in the overall system".

Ma praised a new requirement that heavy polluters such as [power plants](#) must release detailed environmental information to the general public.

"This will change the dynamic," Ma said. "It's a big step forward for corporate disclosure, which has always lagged behind in China."

"I think that these measures are great, but the challenge is giving the government the motivation to enforce them," he said.

"The pressure needs to come from the public, because the power of the public is large, and they can push forward air pollution control in China."

The China Daily, one of the country's state-run newspapers which have grown increasingly outspoken on the issue of air pollution, said Monday in an editorial that if [local governments](#) obeyed the new measures, "the day would not be too far away when we would be able to enjoy clean air".

[Air pollution](#) contributed to 1.2 million premature deaths and 25 million healthy years of life lost in China in 2010, the US-based Health Effects Institute reported in March, basing its figures on a global survey published in British medical journal The Lancet.

China's pollution problems are blamed on rapid urbanisation and decades of dramatic economic development.

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