

China pollution arrests rise as Beijing pushes green agenda

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Chinese tourists wear facemasks during a visit to Tiananmen Square as heavy air pollution shrouds Beijing on February 26, 2014

China arrested more people last year for environmental offences than in the previous 10 combined, state media said Thursday, as Beijing strives to produce results after a much-vaunted pollution crackdown.

The official Xinhua news agency said 200 people had been arrested and

more than 3,500 companies and workshops shut down for environmental violations, figures that remained comparatively modest in a nation of 1.3 billion beset by air and [water pollution](#) and waste disposal problems.

Environmental authorities transferred a total of 706 cases in 2013 to police in 2013—more than all the cases referred in the previous decade—the official Xinhua news agency said, citing figures provided by Chinese environment minister Zhou Shengxian.

The news follows a move by China in April to amend its environmental protection law for the first time in 25 years, imposing tougher penalties on polluters and pledging that violators will be "named and shamed". The changes take effect on January 1, 2015.

Beijing is acutely aware of an increasing number of angry protests over environmental concerns in the country, where three decades of rapid and unfettered industrial expansion have taken a heavy toll.

Premier Li Keqiang announced in March that Beijing was "declaring war" against pollution.

Recent studies have shown that roughly two-thirds of China's soil is estimated to be polluted and that 60 percent of underground water is too contaminated to drink.

But China's leaders also vigilantly repress any environmentally-related social unrest that might threaten their grip on power.

Last month, police detained 60 people in the eastern city of Hangzhou for their role in a violent demonstration that prompted officials to promise to suspend construction of a waste incinerator.

In April state media said police detained 18 people over massive rallies

opposing a chemical plant in Maoming in the southern province of Guangdong after thousands of demonstrators took to the streets for days of protests.

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