

# China Focus

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Students at Beihuanlu Primary School in Qinhuangdao, north China's Hebei Province, paint during an activity on "caring for the environment, protecting the planet" on April 20

# Green Commitment

## China gears up for a fiercer and more expansive battle against pollution

With fewer smoggy days and more blue skies, the winter of 2017-18 in Beijing and the neighboring areas of Tianjin and Hebei Province was regarded as heralding in the initial success of the battle against air pollution in China. Yet the government isn't prepared to rest on its laurels as evidenced by its most recent action plan which encompasses a bigger vision.

Official figures from the meteorological authorities show that in 2017, only 21 heavy pollution days were recorded in Beijing and its vicinity, a much lower figure compared with 58 in 2013. That was the peak year for pollution when the Central Government introduced its Action Plan on Air Pollution Control and Prevention.

Since then, pollution has seen a steady decline. Monitoring stations across China recorded 27.5 smoggy days on average in 2017, 19.4 fewer than in 2013. This figure is expected to fall further in the coming years. In June, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, China's cabinet, unveiled a guideline on the specific pollution prevention and control targets the country expects to achieve by 2020 and beyond. The document set the stage for China's environmental protection efforts in the years to come.

The guideline called for waging a war against pollution in fields such as air, water and soil, which shows the government's resolve to address pressing public concerns, said Lu Jun, Vice President of the Chinese Academy for Environmental Planning. Achievements in these major areas will pave the way for all-round environmental progress, he added.

### Blue skies

The fight against air pollution, as the guideline stated, will focus on regions including Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei and surrounding areas, as well as the Yangtze River Delta, Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces—the main coal-producing regions in the country—will also be targeted.

By 2020, cities should see the number of good-air days reach over 80 percent annually, according to the guideline.

Emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides should drop at least 15 percent from 2015 levels, while chemical oxygen demand and ammonia nitrogen emissions should decrease by over 10 percent.

On June 11, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) began to dispatch inspection teams to 80 targeted cities to review the state of

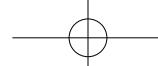
air pollution prevention and control. This round of inspections will last until April 2019 and involve some 18,000 inspectors.

The teams have already spotted problems such as air pollution control law violations, failed attempts by local authorities to shut down or upgrade high-emission enterprises, and companies discharging industrial dust into the air without proper treatment. Immediate responses have been demanded.

Meanwhile, on May 30, a court in Jinzhong, north China's Shanxi Province, sentenced five people, including former head of the local environmental protection bureau, to six months to two years in prison for tampering with air quality-monitoring equipment and falsifying data.

This case shows that some local governments may fabricate achievements without honoring their commitments to environmental protection, the MEE commented. The ministry will enhance supervision over data collection and take an uncompromising stance against falsification.

By Yuan Yuan



Taking legal action against perpetrators is one way to address environmental problems. Last year, Chinese courts concluded 20,602 criminal cases related to pollution and 190,125 civil disputes involving environmental protection, according to the Supreme People's Court.

President Xi Jinping called for strict measures in protecting the environment during a tone-setting meeting on environmental protection held in Beijing in May.

China will push for coordination between economic and social development and an ecological civilization, Xi said.

He put forward a number of principles on building an ecological civilization, including ensuring harmony between humankind and nature, greatly valuing lucid waters and lush mountains, introducing effective institutional arrangements, and getting involved in global environmental governance.

Xi also said efforts should be made across the board to promote green development, which he believes is not only essential for a modernized, high-quality economy but also provides a fundamental solution to environmental pollution.

Key emphases include adjusting the economic structure and the energy structure; improving the industrial layout in different regions; fostering and expanding industries concerning energy conservation, environmental protection, and clean production and energy; and encouraging simple, moderate, green, and low-carbon ways of life.

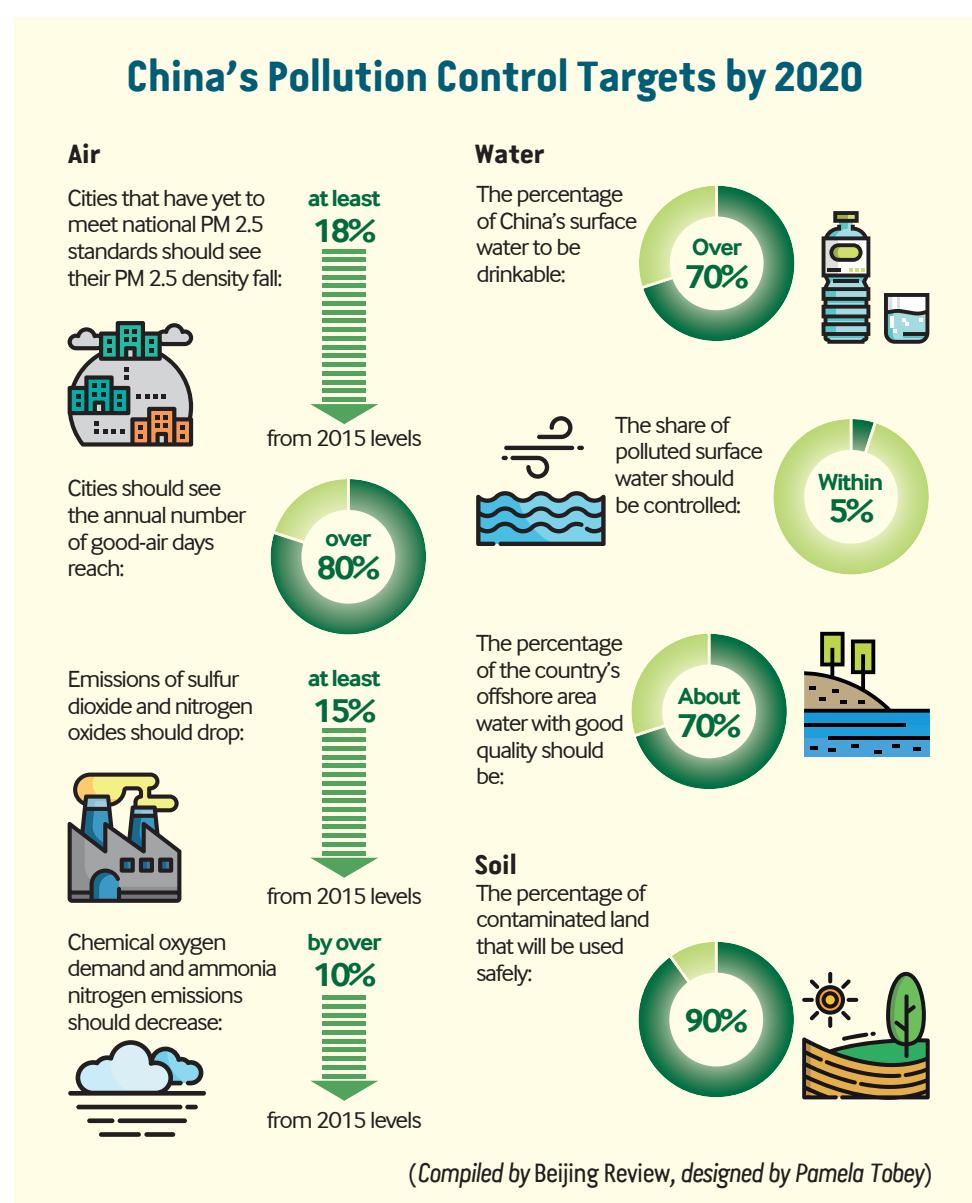
## Clear water

China released the Action Plan for Water Pollution Control and Prevention and the Action Plan for Soil Pollution Control and Prevention in 2015 and 2016, respectively. In the new guideline, the goals for these two areas are more detailed.

For water quality improvement, the country will continue to implement the action plan on fighting water pollution as well as the system of "river and lake chiefs." These chiefs are officials responsible for the management and protection of water resources who will be held accountable if environmental damage occurs in bodies of water under their supervision. There are now approximately 320,000 river chiefs at various administrative levels nationwide.

By 2020, over 70 percent of the surface water in China will be fit to drink and the share of polluted surface water should be controlled within 5 percent. In addition, about 70 percent of the country's offshore area water should be of good quality.

Notably, restoration of the ecosystems along China's longest river is high on the agenda for the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt. Polluting enterprises are banned from relocating to middle and upper reaches of the river. By 2020, no water in the Yangtze River system should be



(Compiled by Beijing Review, designed by Pamela Tobey)

ranked lower than Grade V, which is heavily polluted according to China's water quality standards.

To address soil pollution, China will take specific measures to restore polluted soil, promote waste classification and enhance prevention and control of solid waste pollution. By 2020, 90 percent of the contaminated land should be used safely, according to the guideline.

Rural areas also feature in more detail in the new anti-pollution guideline. According to the document, a survey of agricultural land pollution will be completed by the end of 2018 and heavily polluted land should be prohibited from harvesting edible agricultural products. Sewage and garbage in villages will be better managed and treated.

Life in rural areas has become more urbanized, which has led to an increase in locally generated

waste, said Mao Da, a policy consultant at the China Zero Waste Alliance, adding that how to deal with such waste requires more targeted measures instead of merely duplicating the urban mode of waste disposal.

Promoting green development models and lifestyles is an important part of China's anti-pollution campaign, said Xu Biju, an official with the National Environmental Protection Inspection Office. Only when the discharge of pollutants is drastically reduced at the source can there be an evident improvement in the environment. ■



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