

China: Targeted, Efficient Anti-Pollution Measures to Come

26/12/2018



China wants to make long-term environmental improvements while juggling long-term economic growth.

China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) announced that more efficient and targeted measures against pollution will be adopted in 2019.

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“We will coordinate environmental protection with [economic development](#),” the MEE said in a statement and added that such an approach “will not relax the [protection] targets or ease the crackdown on violators.”

The push for new environmental measures comes in a moment when the Chinese economy is facing downward pressures due to the [United States trade war against China](#).

Despite this adverse external factor, Chinese planners have promised to put an end to a “growth at all costs” economic model which has blackened its skies and contaminated large stretches of its water and soil.

[China's government](#) just embarked on a winter campaign against polluters in a dozen smog-prone provinces and regions. Environmental compliance has become thus a key test of political loyalty among local officials.

However, at the same time, these officials must also keep the economy on track, which is a difficult task to achieve since China's third-quarter growth is at its lowest since the 2008 global financial crisis.

"Local governments in the polluting regions are working hard to reduce air pollution but also are exhausted," said Zhu Shu, the regional director of the East Asia Secretariat of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), an NGO that helps local governments tackle pollution.

To achieve a balance between economic growth and environmental protection could be a contradictory task.

While China's Government abandoned production cuts in heavy industry as part of its campaign against pollution and allowed local authorities to adopt measures based on regional emission levels, declining air quality in northern China has stirred concerns that authorities are easing up on violations.

In Beijing, the average concentration of lung-damaging particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns (PM2.5) jumped upwards 61 percent in November compared with the same month last year. In a group of smog-prone 26 northern cities, PM2.5 readings rose 33 percent in the same period.

For the first 11 months of the year, air quality in Linfen which has become China's main coal mining center, was the worst among the 169 cities nationwide.

"China's environmental protection campaign is facing multiple pressures...Some regions have weakened their cognition of the significance of the environment amid economic downstream pressure and we have seen imbalanced work progress in different places," said the MEE.

The MEE has scheduled a second round of national environmental inspections in 2019 and vowed to win the war against air pollution.

Up to the end of November, the MEE said it has issued 166,210 notices of penalty decisions to environmental regulation violators, with fines totaling US\$1.98 billion.

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