China: taking action on climate change

What China is doing in response to climate change?

Due to the urgency of climate change, China, along with other nations, has recognized that it has a responsibility to take action to reform its energy sector and curb its greenhouse gas pollution. China has set strong goals that if achieved would represent strong action on climate change in the near term. China's National Climate Change Program, which was released by the Chinese government in early June, is the first comprehensive national program on climate change adopted by any developing country.

China's National Climate Change Program is a compilation of mostly existing policies including:

- A renewable energy target (15 percent of total energy by 2020);
- An ambitious plan for energy efficiency (20 percent reduction by 2010),
- Increase the forest coverage rate to 20 percent by 2010.

The enforcement of environmental policies in China has, however, been generally poor due to the lack of willingness to implement at the local level. On the other hand, the international community and Americans should not let the United States shift the blame to China on global warming until the U.S. has passed and implemented a national plan of its own that is clearly up the task.

The Chinese Government has stated that they need support from the international community to deal with climate change to help shift new investments away from fossil fuels toward energy efficiency and renewable energy. It is in the interests of all nations that China is able to quickly decarbonize its economy and work with the international community to install clean energy technologies to increase low carbon and renewable energy take-up.

China key facts and figures

- The energy self-supply rate of China has been around 90 percent, almost 20 percent higher than that of OECD countries, and 30 percent higher than that of America.
- Despite its projected increase in coal-fired electricity generation, China has announced it will close down 50 GW of its most polluting coal-fired plants.
- According to the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP) China's total carbon dioxide emissions for 2006 surpassed those of the USA by eight percent (the population of China is four times that of the U.S.)
- As total emissions have grown, China has significantly reduced its emissions intensity (emissions per unit of GDP), largely through aggressive energy efficiency policies.
- Fuel efficiency standards more stringent than those in the U.S., Canada, and Australia.

Unique challenges for China

- China has 22 percent of world population with 43 percent living in cities;

- It has employment, poverty and development challenges with tens of millions of Chinese living on less than $83 U.S. a year;
- It is a country highly vulnerable to climate change;
- It has serious health challenges with the WHO estimating that 750,000 people die prematurely every year because of polluted air and water;
- From 1978[1] to 2005, the average yearly growth of primary energy consumption grew by 5.16%.

Greenpeace China Energy [R]evolution Scenario[2]

Greenpeace analysis shows that China can beat its own global warming targets and hold carbon dioxide emissions around current levels by giving stronger support to energy efficiency and renewables. The country would not have to sacrifice economic growth that has pulled hundreds of millions of people out of poverty to achieve a cleaner energy mix.

The projections of the International Energy Agency show that the Chinese CO2 emissions will more than double this century in a 'business as usual' scenario. The Greenpeace scenario shows that this growth can be limited and that CO2 emissions can peak around 2030, and then stabilize at the 2000 level by 2050. China has the potential to be the world's number one renewable energy country.

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[1] 1978 was the year China started its reform from state-owned economy to market economy.

[2] The report, *Energy [R]evolution: A Sustainable China Energy Outlook,* was a joint project by Greenpeace and the Institute DLR, Institute of Technical Thermodynamics, Department of Systems Analysis and Technology Assessment, Stuttgart, Germany. The China-specific report was co-authored by Prof. Zhang Exiling, Tsinghua University, Beijing and Ailun Yang at Greenpeace China. It can be downloaded at:
http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/china/en/press/reports/energy-revolution.pdf
http://www.energyblueprint.info