

Cara [blogged](#) earlier this week about the fact that U.S. emissions were down “a whopping 7 % in 2009.” Just when you might have been thinking that we are headed in the right direction on the climate change front, today's New York Times has [a distressing story](#) about Chinese emissions. The take home point:

Coal-fired electricity and oil sales [in China] each climbed 24 percent in the first quarter from a year earlier, on the heels of similar increases in the fourth quarter.

That means, of course, that greenhouse gas emissions from all the new demand for coal and oil are rising rapidly too. The article has a number of interesting observations:

- 1) Much of the increase in energy usage is the result of domestic demand for housing, cars, appliances and infrastructure projects rather than for the manufacture of exports to the west. In other words, China is becoming more like the U.S. (though per capita greenhouse gas emissions are still a fraction of the U.S.'s);
- 2) Despite the fact that Premier Wen Jiabao has committed China to improve its energy efficiency by 20 percent between 2005 and 2010, energy efficiency *actually fell* by 3 percent in the first quarter of this year. And
- 3) at least some of the energy usage currently occurring may be helpful in improving longer term energy efficiency as China invests in improving rail transportation, a far less dirty transportation system than relying on trucks to haul goods across the country.

So what does all this mean for efforts to meet long term emissions reduction goals? It's almost all bad news. If China can't meet even its relatively modest goals for energy efficiency, it's hard to imagine the rest of the world stepping up to cut emissions dramatically. But even more importantly, we simply can't meet climate goals unless we can get Chinese emissions under control. The country is now emitting such a high percentage of the world's emissions on an annual basis and its growth rate is so extraordinary that China simply has to slow its emissions rate dramatically in order to limit temperature increases.

There's always [geoengineering](#) as an alternative