



Urban Air Pollution in China

Air pollution in China is a global problem, because of climate change, and a California problem, because pollutants from China reach the U.S. West Coast.

An [article](#) in the current issue of Nature has good news and bad news about coal and pollution in China. The good news is increased pollution control. The authors estimate that “new equipment reduced SO₂ emissions from China’s power plants by 1.5 million tonnes in 2005 and by 17.5 million tonnes in 2010 — 54% of the country’s total SO₂ emissions in 2005 (32.3 million tonnes).”

The bad news is that this improvement is largely offset by increased coal usage by industry:

Chinese SO₂ emissions only decreased by 11% (to 28.7 million tonnes in 2010) because those from other sectors grew (see ‘China’s emissions battle’). Coal usage rose by 44% (955 million tonnes), more than one-third of which was consumed by industrial facilities (such as iron, steel and cement works) that have no desulphurization systems.

Here are some of the main recommendations:

1. A cap could be set for national total coal consumption, and economic plans developed under this constraint. Tertiary service industries and high-technology projects could be promoted instead of energy-intensive ones.
2. Greater authority should be given to environmental agencies at various levels of government.
3. As well as reducing SO₂ emissions, the government should endorse measures to limit soot.
4. Controlling emissions from diesel vehicles should be a priority, and oil companies should be brought into accordance with environmental standards.