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China to Tackle Air Pollution with a New Action Plan

China's State Council released its Action Plan for Air Pollution Prevention and Control (Action Plan) (http://english.mep.gov.cn/News_service/infocus/201309/t20130924_260707.htm) on 12 September 2013, eight months after the widely-reported air pollution episode that occurred in the January 2013, which covered one-sixth of China's territory. The Action Plan sets the road map for air pollution and control for the next five years in China with a focus on three key regions – Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area (Jing-Jin-Ji), Yangtze River Delta (YRD) and Pearl River Delta (PRD). The Action Plan release was reported publicly by state media on the website of the China central government, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV as a crucial step forward for air pollution prevention and control in China.

TARGETS

Jing-Jin-Ji is the most stringently targeted region

The objective of this plan is to improve air quality and reduce the air pollution episodes in China, especially the three key regions– Jing-Jin-Ji, YRD and PRD, for which different targets are set for improvement by 2017 and where the Jing-Jin-Ji region is the most stringently targeted.

- For all the second- and third-tier cities, annual average concentration of PM10 should be reduced by at least 10% comparing to 2012 level, and number of days with clean air should be increased;
- For the three key regions, annual average concentration of PM2.5 should be reduced by 25%, 20%, 15% respectively; and
- For Beijing, annual average concentration of PM2.5 should be controlled at 60ug/m3 level.



Current Targets Demonstrate Progress, But Remain Weak

These targets are conservative, given that the desired PM2.5 concentration for Beijing(60ug/m3) in 2017 is still higher yet than the 35ug/m3 limit established in the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (GB3095-2012) for average PM2.5 concentration, which was issued in 2012 and is to be implemented in 2016.

In addition, targets for PM2.5 concentration in cities in the three key regions except Beijing are unclear, as they require percentage reductions in PM2.5 concentration compared to a base year. However, the annual average concentration of PM2.5 in those cities in 2012 has not been reported, and may not even exist because PM2.5 had not been widely monitored and assessed before 2013.

MEASURES

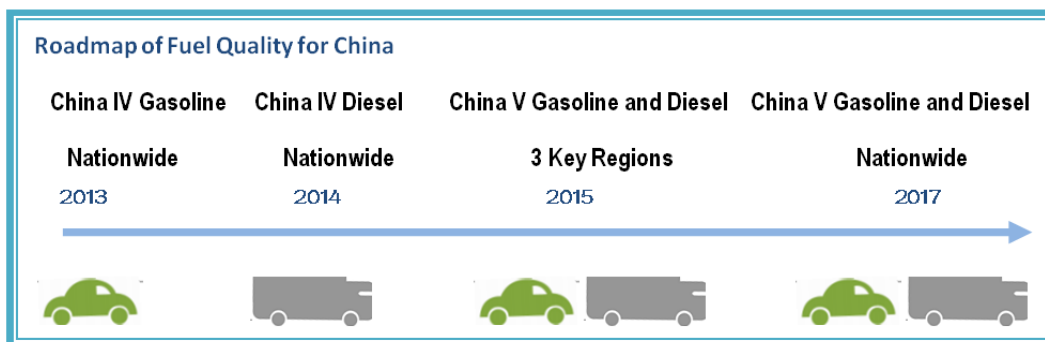
In June 2013, 10 measures were disclosed in a strongly-worded statement by the State Council to prevent and control air pollution, called the National 10 Measures. The Action Plan is the detailed implementation plan of the National 10 Measures with 35 sub-sections grouped under the 10 measure areas:

- Reduced emission of multi-pollutants;
- Promotion of industry upgrades and restructuring;
- Acceleration of companies’ technology upgrading;
- Acceleration of energy restructuring;
- Enforcement of energy-saving and environmental protection in market entrance requirements;
- Application of market-oriented instruments and environmental economic policies;
- Improvement of the legal framework, implementation and enforcement;
- Establishment of regional collaboration mechanisms;
- Establishment of monitoring, alerting and emergency response systems for air pollution episodes; and
- Definition of responsibilities and engage with government, private sector and the public for environmental protection.

Even though most measures of the Action Plan are a rehash of the “12th Five Year Plan on Air Pollution Prevention and Control for the Key Regions” released in December 2012, it does set some new and important mandates and initiatives in the following aspects:

Specific Targets for Coal Consumption and Vehicle Emissions Control

- Control of coal consumption
By 2017, the proportion of coal in total energy consumption in China will be reduced to 65%, while the proportion of non-fossil energy consumption will be increased to 13%. The three key regions shall make efforts to achieve negative growth of total coal consumption, and replace coal with natural gas for coal-fired boilers, industrial furnaces, and self-sustained coal-fired power stations.
- Phasing-out of heavily polluting vehicles
By 2015, all yellow label vehicles registered before the end of 2005 shall be phased out in the three key regions. By 2017, all yellow label vehicles will be phased out nationwide.
- Clear timeline of clean fuel supply
Cleaner gasoline and diesel will be provided step by step as showed in the following roadmap.



(<http://cleanairasia.org/wp-content/uploads/portal/files/11.png>) Source: Compiled by Clean Air Asia

Mechanism Development



- Establishment of regional collaboration mechanisms in Jing-Jin-Ji and YRD with the participation of provincial governments and relevant central ministries in the region;
- Air pollution monitoring and alert system will be established together by environmental protection and meteorological agencies.

New incentives

- Central government will disclose 10 best and 10 worst air quality cities monthly;
- Targets for PM2.5 in the three key regions and PM10 in other key areas other than the three key regions will be considered as compulsory targets in the social and economic development objectives for provinces and be part of the performance evaluation indicators for provincial leaders.

LOCAL RESPONSE

In response to the Action Plan, both Beijing and Hebei have released their local actions plans- the Beijing Clean Air Action Plan (2013-2017) and Hebei Implementation Scheme of Action Plan of Air Pollution Prevention and Control. Detailed targets including the tonnes of coal to be reduced are set by Beijing and Hebei. Beijing has furthermore laid down focused measures on vehicle emissions control, in particular, setting vehicle cap at the 6 million level by 2017, amongst more than 40 other measures.

CLEAN AIR ASIA'S ROLE

Clean Air Asia will continue to provide balanced, world-class support to cities to implement the Action Plan under the China City Air Quality Management (AQM) Network co-organized by the Foreign Economic Cooperation Office of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Clean Air Asia, established in 2005. Under this framework, the 10th City AQM workshop will be held later this year focusing on the specific topics of the Action Plan implementation.

In the mean time, green freight and clean fuels and vehicles will remain as the focus of Clean Air Asia's transport related work in China. Green freight is one of the key tasks for addressing air pollution under the Beijing Clean Air Action Plan (2013-2017). Unfortunately, this important topic is not included in the national Action Plan. Clean Air Asia will continue our work through the China Green Freight Initiative platform to raise the awareness of decision-makers of the importance of freight management in terms of air pollution control and energy consumption reduction and provide support on its achievement.

Clean Air Asia will also continue to work with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, other government agencies, international organizations and industry to promote the acceleration of automotive (gasoline and diesel) emission standards that can take advantage of better fuel quality as it is implemented across the target regions, and finally across the country.

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