

[China Pollution Census: Study Took Two Years And 570,000 Staff](#)

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BEIJING — China has revealed its most ambitious measure of what explosive development has done to its environment, saying Tuesday its first national pollution census has mapped nearly 6 million sources of industrial, residential and agricultural waste.

The world's largest polluter also said its pollution levels might peak sooner than expected as China tries to balance economic and green concerns.

The central government now has a year to use the census results to shape its next five-year environmental protection plan. Ministries are also studying the possibility of an environmental tax, China's vice minister of environmental protection, Zhang Lijun, told a news conference.

In the meantime, detailed census results remain out of the view of an increasingly vocal Chinese public. Only the government and officials at relevant ministries have access to it.

"This is an incredibly ambitious source survey of pollutants," said Deborah Seligsohn, principal adviser for the World Resources Institute on China's climate and energy issues. "In terms of giving them an excellent basis for being able to manage and track what they're doing, it's a huge step forward."

The survey, which took two years and 570,000 staff to complete, puts China ahead of other developing countries in having a detailed map of who is polluting and where.

For the first time, China has factored agricultural sources into its pollution studies.

"That's huge," Seligsohn said. "Many challenges China faces in terms of water quality come from organic pollution rather than from chemicals."

Until now, the foundation of China's policymaking and environmental planning wasn't firm because agricultural pollution wasn't included, said Ma Jun, perhaps China's best-known environmentalist. He led efforts to create the country's first public database on water pollution, now posted online.

China's new government database of 5.9 million pollution sources included in the national census is not yet publicly available – which Ma and environmental groups picked up on right away.

"We urge the government to immediately establish a strong platform through which the public could easily access a wide range of pollution data," Sze Pang Cheung, campaign director for Greenpeace China, said in a statement.

Opening up the survey results would let the Chinese public monitor the country's biggest polluters and the worst polluted areas, said Yu Jie, head of policy and research programs for The Climate Group China.

"In this regard, it would be big progress. But if those data are only open to governments, then this civil society function doesn't work," she said.

Chinese citizens are more and more outspoken about environmental issues, with a number of recent protests of proposed incinerator projects in the south.

The central government, pressured by years of scandals over lax pollution controls, has been pushing for stronger regulation.

On Tuesday, the vice minister of environmental protection said China's pollution levels might peak sooner than the world expects.

"Because China's path to economic development has been different from that taken by developed nations, China may well pass the peak polluting levels and see marked improvement by the time our per capita income reaches the \$3,000 level," Zhang said.

Despite the wealth of new information found by the census, Zhang said "basically, there was nothing that surprised us."

It was not clear whether China would conduct the survey regularly.

Associated Press researcher Yu Bing contributed to this report.

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