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## HAZY RESULTS FOR POLLUTION CLEANUP; NOT ALL CITIES UNDER UN-BACKED PILOT EFFORT SEE IMPROVEMENTS

Alice Yan

Some of the mainland's most polluted cities have cleaned up their act over the past few years with the help of a joint UN-central government programme, but others are still choking under a contaminated shroud.

Eighteen cities across the country were enlisted four years ago as pilot centres for the Clean Energy Action project, a US\$ 3.19 million initiative funded by the United Nations Development Programme and the central government, said a report released in Beijing yesterday.

The project aimed to help the cities reduce air pollution by adopting cleaner energy technology or switching to greener power sources.

Most cities in the programme registered a 40 per cent increase in the number of days in a year with very little pollution compared with five years ago.

More than half had improved air quality by reducing sulfur dioxide and total suspended particulate levels by 10 per cent to 30 per cent.

A six percentage point decrease in coal's contribution to total energy consumption in the pilot cities - from 72 per cent to 66 per cent - also contributed to the cleaner air.

But the report's authors also noted that in some cities the situation had not improved significantly, and in some cases had even worsened.

For example, the Shaanxi city of Xian had seen a 30 per cent surge in coal consumption since 2000 and its sulfur dioxide emissions had remained well above an acceptable level.

And in Jinan, in Shandong, total suspended particulate levels had increased and the city had fewer days with clear skies.

On the positive side, several major cities including Beijing recorded significant improvement. In the capital, the percentage of clean-air days a year went from 48.4 per cent in 2001 to 62.5 per cent last year.

In Taiyuan, Shanxi province, the percentage went up from 24.9 per cent to 61.4 per cent.

China is expected to quadruple its gross domestic product and double its energy consumption by 2020.

Science and Technology vice-minister Ma Songde said it would be a tough task to ensure that the volume of pollution discharged stayed at the existing level.

Wang Jirong , a vice-director of the State Environmental Protection Agency, says more than 110 million people in cities, equivalent to around a third of China's urban population, lived in environments with badly contaminated air last year.

She said China was the world's biggest consumer of coal last year, burning 1.9 billion tonnes of the resource, and the major goal was to decrease reliance on the fuel.

Ni Weidou, a researcher from the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said some big cities, such as Beijing and Guangzhou, should also focus their efforts on lowering vehicle emissions.