

Inspections expose mass environmental violations



Heavy smog hits Beijing. [Photo/China.org.cn]

Inspections have exposed violations by companies illegally discharging pollutants and falsifying monitoring data, despite emergency responses to the ongoing air pollution in northern regions, according to the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

Severe violations were exposed by the nation's top environmental officials during random inspections in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and the neighboring provinces of Henan, Shanxi and Shandong, it said.

The ministry announced the launch of a yearlong intensified inspection program in the area's 28 major cities, starting on Wednesday. Up to 5,600 government workers will be transferred from across the nation to support the mission, making the campaign the largest-ever national operation in the field of environmental protection.

On Tuesday, Chen Jining, the minister of environmental protection, visited Sinopec Beijing Yanshan Co, a major petrochemical enterprise in Fangshan district, to inspect levels of discharged pollutants. Chen said that after waiting for 20 minutes, he was unable to obtain records on the repairing of equipment related to emissions monitoring.

It showed the company failed to operate as required in controlling and reducing emissions of air pollutants, and it has been required to correct its problems, Chen said.

In addition to poor management, Zhao Yingmin, the vice-minister of environmental protection, exposed severe violations by a new material production company in Anyang, Henan province, which was found to have falsified monitoring data to make sulfur dioxide emission levels show a negative reading.

As of Monday, inspectors in seven cities in northern regions had exposed 200 pollution problems, including excessive emissions, falsified monitoring data and weak implementation of laws by local governments, according to the ministry.

The ministry said on Wednesday that blue-sky days in the 28 major cities in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and neighboring provinces of Henan, Shanxi and Shandong accounted for 60.9 percent of the month, an increase of 20.6 percent year-on-year.

But in the first quarter of this year, only 42.8 percent of days had good air, a decrease of 0.7 percent compared with last year.

The air pollution that blanketed many cities on Monday started to ease on Wednesday, with pollution levels falling from severe to lightly polluted or good, according to data from the China National Environmental Monitoring Center.

Beijing started to see the air quality improve by 5 pm on Wednesday, but it is forecast to worsen again on Thursday, becoming severe, the second-highest level in the six-tier quality system, according to the monitoring center.

At least 13 cities, including Beijing, had issued orange alerts, the second-highest emergency response level, as of Wednesday, requiring limited use of vehicles and the suspension of production at some industrial sites.

"It's essential to implement the restriction efforts fully, and tighten the controls on construction sites and dust caused by vehicles," Chen said.