

North China province pledges to cut PM 2.5 by 40 pct

Shanxi has joined other regions in northern China by taking measures to mitigate air pollution in the autumn and winter seasons.

The coal-rich province vowed to cut the levels of PM 2.5 and sulfur dioxide by 40 percent from October to March, said the provincial environmental protection bureau Wednesday.

Local governments in northern China are taking harsher measures to fight air pollution with more residents increasingly worried about the health impacts.

Airborne particles smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter pose a greater health threat as they can get deeper into the lungs than larger particles. The high levels of sulfur dioxide in some cities in Shanxi during the past winter heating seasons have also worried many.

The local government plans to cap the average hourly levels of sulfur dioxide in 11 cities at 800 micrograms per cubic meter.

To achieve this goal, authorities ordered the closure of small highly polluting firms and cut production in heavy industry. The burning of low-quality coal has been banned in the whole province and coal has been banned completely in parts of six major cities.

In addition, one million households will have been switched to electric or gas heating systems, as opposed to traditional coal fired heating, by the end of the month.

Other provinces and cities in northern China have also rolled out pollution reduction measures.

In Shandong, the provincial government has offered 600 million yuan (90.2 million U.S. dollars) in subsidies for people switching from traditional coal-fired heating sources to gas and electric in six cities that affect the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

Authorities in Hebei and Tianjin have taken similar measures, including ordering heavily polluting industries, including steel, casting and coking, to restrict production and cut their pollutant emissions.

China has set a target to reduce the level of PM 2.5 pollution by at least 15 percent in the cities around the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region between October 2017 and March 2018.