

# Blue Sky Roadmap Report II: Real-time Disclosure Begins

## Press Release

Beijing, China

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January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Beijing, China – The Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, in conjunction with Renmin University Institute of Environment and Planning<sup>1</sup>, the SEE Foundation, Friends of Nature, Envirofriends and Nature University, will jointly release the Blue Sky Roadmap – Atmospheric Pollution Investigation Phase II Report, which finds that based on the real time disclosure of on-line monitoring data, a group of major emitters, including thermal power plants and steel factories, are seriously exceeding pollution discharge limits. The report also calls for close public supervision to motivate relevant parties to reduce emissions.

In 2013, many areas of China were frequently blanketed by serious levels of smog, which led to increased discussions amongst the general public as to how the smog could be controlled. Compared with the situation highlighted in IPE's December 2011 Blue Sky Roadmap Report, significant progress has since been made in how China publishes information and provides emergency warnings. Furthermore, in 2013, Shandong, Zhejiang, and Hebei started to publish real time online monitoring data for key pollution sources, which has provided important underlying data to help understand the sources of smog.

As of January 2nd, 2014, 179 cities were releasing air quality information in real time. Residents of these cities can use their computers, and even their smart phones, to understand all the air quality information available. Real time disclosure has highlighted serious pollution, which has prompted several areas to develop emergency contingency plans for times when pollution is severe. However, details on the implementation and effectiveness of some crucial measures has still not been confirmed.

To control smog, emissions must be reduced. However, opinions differ as to the sources of this pollution. Through data analysis the report concludes that current pollution has obvious regional characteristics. Therefore, the understanding of pollution sources must also be expanded to regional analysis, rather than just individual cities. The areas of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, as well as the Yangtze River Delta, have many energy intensive industries that consume large amounts of coal and generate huge amounts of pollution discharge. In order to reduce emissions, discharge from large scale power plants, steel factories, cement producers and chemical enterprises must first of all be controlled.

Since February 2013, environmental NGOs and entrepreneurial groups have worked together to push for the real-time disclosure of pollution source information. This effort has been rewarded with active responses from authorities in Beijing and Hebei. Furthermore, on July 30<sup>th</sup> 2013, the

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<sup>1</sup> The full name is the Institute of Environmental Policy and Planning of the Renmin University of China

Ministry of Environmental Protection issued a new regulation requiring all provinces to establish an online platform to allow for the disclosure of real-time online monitoring data from major emitters.

The provinces of Shandong, Zhejiang, and Hebei were among the first to start real-time disclosure of online monitoring data. Ma Jun, The Director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, has said that the good practice shown in Shandong, Zhejiang and Hebei Provinces helps fulfil the public's right to know, and also helps to identify the main pollution sources within that geographical region. However, online disclosure platforms in other important provinces and municipalities, such as Tianjin, Guangdong and Hunan, have not been published as required, which is regrettable.

Wang Limin, Vice Secretary of the SEE Foundation, has stated that, "The control of atmospheric air pollution will not happen overnight. In addition to efforts by, and cooperation within, all levels of government, the participation of citizen groups and the general public is of equal importance. Real-time pollution source information disclosure is an important guarantee of public participation and supervision."

From preliminary research of this online data, it was found that in provinces such as Shandong and Hebei in the North of China, a group of large scale thermal power plants and steel factories had emissions that were in serious breach of discharge standards. Even when the local area was experiencing a period of severe pollution, some of these enterprises were continuing to breach discharge standards almost every hour. The direct impact of these variations in discharge volumes from main pollution sources deserves further discussion.

Real-time disclosure helps in understanding the pollution sources located in a particular region. By comparing online data, it was found that the level of industrial pollution source discharge varied significantly from region to region. Looking at the discharge from some of the major enterprises in Shandong, Hebei and Beijing for the period October to December 2013, nitrogen oxide discharge volume for eight major pollution sources in Shandong, and eight in Hebei, were respectively 37 and 30 times greater than the discharge from eight main pollution sources in Beijing for the same period. This shows that these pollution sources should be the focus for emissions reductions.

It should be noted that Shandong province has already brought forward the implementation of stricter discharge standards for key industries like thermal power and steel production, and Hebei has also recently implemented new stricter standards for the steel industry. However, key provincial and municipal discharge standards in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Liaoning Provinces, as well as discharge standards for thermal power production and cement factories in Hebei Province, and NO<sub>x</sub> standards in Tianjin Municipality, have yet to be made more stringent. Gu Beibei, a Senior Project Manager from IPE, feels that even though there is less than a year before new national emission standards for power and iron and steel industries are implemented, many companies are still not fully prepared. Whether or not these companies can reach the national standards within six months is a worry.

The widespread smog that engulfed China in 2013 has helped to push forward an aggressive

government action plan. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, the State Council issued the “Atmospheric Pollution Prevention Action Plan,” which through 10 measures, aims to distinctly improve air quality over a five year period. This report shows that emissions reduction must be focused, and should start with the control of large scale point source pollution. From the results of this study it can be seen that if some enterprises in key regions like Shandong and Hebei were to comply with discharge standards, including the new standards to come in within the next year, then their nitrogen oxide discharge volume would be significantly reduced.

On the topic of emissions reduction methods, Professor Song Guojun from the Renmin University Institute of Environment and Planning has stated that, “In order to tackle atmospheric pollution, the solutions that are easiest to implement should be implemented first, and mature solutions that already exist should be utilized. Existing measures need to be implemented before any more time is spent making grand plans.” Professor Song feels that the biggest source of particulate matter is heavy industry, such as thermal power production, cement factories, and steel factories. Technology to control particulate matter is already advanced; however, according to the limited data that is disclosed, many companies still cannot consistently meet discharge requirements.

It’s difficult to escape the fact that the ten national measures, and regional efforts to reduce emissions, will touch on powerful vested interests, so the challenge in implementing them should not be underestimated. All parties interested in the control of atmospheric pollution cannot sit idly by, which is why the report calls on government, courts, enterprises, media, environmental organizations, and citizens, to seize the historic opportunity created by pollution source information disclosure, and together push for the reduction in pollution emissions, so that the smog that hangs over Chinese cities can be dispersed as quickly as possible.

Linda Greer, director of NRDC’s health and environment program, has stated that “Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China will be able to take advantage of instantaneous access to real time data on emissions. If a city is having a very bad air pollution day, citizens will be able to research the biggest sources of the problem.”