

## Acid rain causes heavy losses

COAL, which accounts for about 75 per cent of China's energy production, is the main cause of sulphur dioxide emissions.

Some 600 million tons of coal were consumed nationwide in 1980, with the figure more than doubling to 1.28 billion tons in 1995.

At the same time, sulphur dioxide emissions increased by 1 million tons year-on-year during the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1991-95).

The increase in sulphur dioxide emissions has caused more acid rain to fall in many parts of the country.

In the early 1980s, acid rain was mostly concentrated in the southwestern areas. Chongqing, then in Sichuan Province, Guiyang in Guizhou Province and Liuzhou in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region were typical examples, covering some 1.7 million square kilometres of land.

By the middle of the 1990s, acid rain had extended to another 1 million square kilometres south of the Yangtze River, the eastern parts of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and most areas of the Sichuan Basin.

Changsha in Hunan Province, and Ganzhou and Nanchang in Jiangxi Province have become the regions most seriously polluted by acid rain.

This rain has caused a reduction in the output of grain, vegetables and fruit, and harmed forests and buildings.

In Chongqing, about 85 per cent of the pines in the forests have been damaged; 35 per cent of them have died since 1980.

Pollution from sulphur dioxide may also cause respiratory diseases.

In 1995, economic losses from acid rain and sulphur dioxide pollution amounted to 110 billion yuan (US\$13.25 billion), or about 2 per cent of that year's gross domestic product, data from the State Environmental Protection Administration indicates.

The Chinese Government has attached great importance to curbing acid rain and sulphur dioxide pollution in recent years.

The State Council approved a national programme on acid rain control in 1990 and demanded the strengthening of scientific research and monitoring. It also started an experiment to levy charges on enterprises discharging sulphur dioxide.

In 1995, the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee revised the Law on Air Pollution Control to stipulate the setting up of special acid rain and sulphur dioxide control zones.

In 1996, the NPC approved the inclusion of acid rain and sulphur dioxide control in the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000) and demanded that greater attention be paid to the treatment of seriously polluted areas.

*Date: 05/04/99*

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