



Cutting Through the Fog with China's First Pollution Information Transparency Index (PITI)

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Developing a coordinated international effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions requires, among other things, that countries have confidence in each others' capacity to monitor and mitigate their GHG emissions. Reliable emissions data in turn relies on the existence of governance systems that make energy and environmental information transparent and publicly available. In May 2008, the Chinese government took a critical step toward furthering environmental transparency by adopting a pair of sweeping disclosure measures—China's State Council *Open Government Information Regulations* and the Ministry of Environmental Protection's *Environmental Information Disclosure Measures*—which for the first time required that government bodies at all levels make certain pollution information publicly available. The Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE) and the Natural Resources Defense Council developed a Pollution Information Transparency Index (PITI) to carry out a systematic assessment of the first year of implementation for these regulations.

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Utilizing the PITI methodology, IPE and NRDC evaluated government disclosure of pollution information from 113 Chinese cities (Figure 1) and graded and ranked their level of disclosure on a 100-point scale, based on eight sets of criteria, including records of rules and standards violations, results of environmental petition and complaints cases, and disclosures upon request. The results of this first-year assessment show that, although there is still much work to be done, many city governments have begun to improve the transparency of their environmental information and are laying the groundwork for further improvements in the future. PITI results indicate that China has made more progress on environmental transparency than many in the international community realize.

Progress Toward Transparency is Being Made Across China

Our analysis of cities throughout China's eastern, central, and western regions revealed important progress toward environmental information transparency. A number of cities have been active in developing various ways to disclose pollution data. Weihai in Shandong Province, for example, was the first city in China to post hourly pollution data, transmitted from online monitoring systems installed in major pollution sources, for public viewing. In Liaoning Province, major cities such as Shenyang have created a search function on their local environmental protection bureau websites, making information more accessible to the public. In response to our request for information, the city of Hefei in Anhui Province published its list of pollution violators on its website to improve compliance and public access to information. Of those cities that have been most proactive, Shanghai, Ningbo, Taiyuan, and Wuhan (Figure 2) have begun to provide systematic disclosure of violations by corporations; Beijing, Chongqing, Fuzhou, and Jiaozuo have demonstrated their commitment to transparency by disclosing information on the handling of petitions and complaint cases; and cities such as Hefei, Qingdao, Kunming, and Zhengzhou have scored highly in their responsiveness to requests for information disclosure.

Figure 1: PITI Assesses Environmental Transparency of 113 Chinese Cities



"All-Star" Cities Demonstrate the Promise of More Effective Pollution Disclosure

After identifying the top scoring cities in each of the eight indicators, we assembled an "all-star team" that we believe can serve as a model for cities seeking to improve environmental transparency in the future. When added together, these top scorers from each of the eight indicator categories combine to form an "all-star city" with a score of 89.5 points (Figure 3). That is, in all categories of information disclosure measured there are top performers in China.

Bridging the Gap Toward Full Environmental Pollution Disclosure

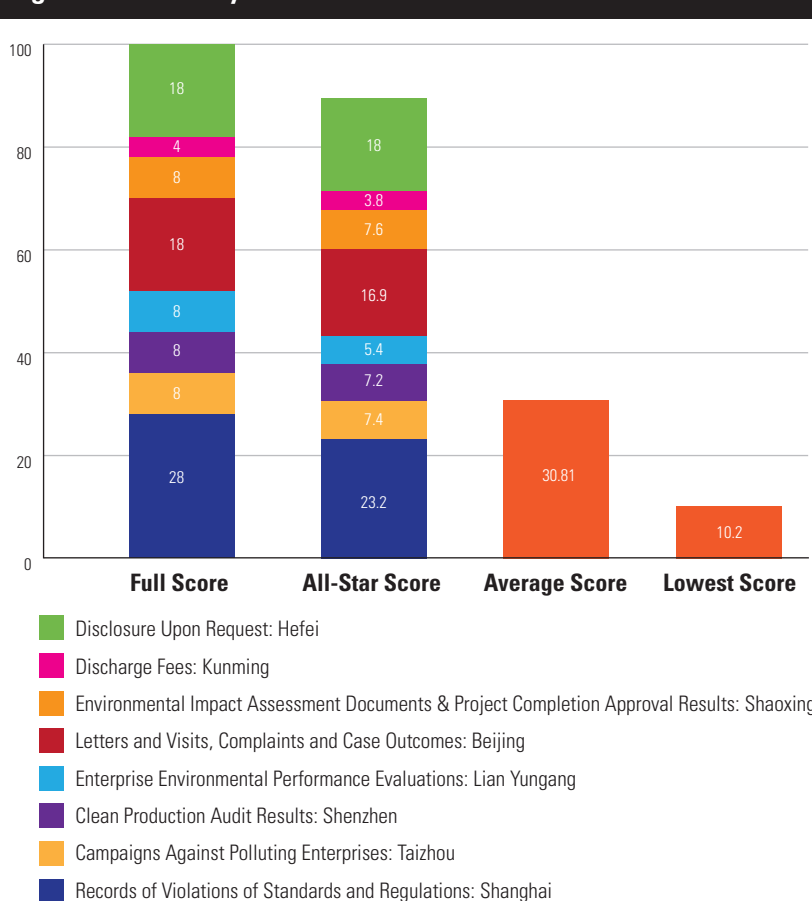
The results of our survey show that, although there are signs of progress in many areas, there is still much work to be done. Out of a possible 100 points, slightly more than 60 points represent the requirements under Chinese law, with the remainder being composed of additional factors that help to meet the information needs of the public. Of the 113 cities assessed, 4 scored above 60 points, 32 cities scored under 20 points, and the average score of all 113 cities was slightly more than 30 points. Further work is needed to raise the awareness of city governments regarding their duty to disclose information. For example, each city was asked to provide a list of polluters that had received administrative punishment and a list of local complaints and how they were handled. Despite the fact that environmental protection bureaus are required to disclose this information, only 27 cities provided complete or partial answers to the requests, while 86 cities ignored them altogether.

We hope that the cities which fell short of China's newly implemented transparency standards will be motivated by this year's PITI results and strive for a better rating next year. There is no reason why every city in China cannot score above 60 in future PITI surveys. An important goal of this assessment has been to identify those cities that have made the most progress toward transparency and to encourage other cities to adopt their methods and match their commitment to disclosure of environmental information.

Figure 2: Wuhan's Online Disclosure of Emissions from Major Pollution Sources



Figure 3: PITI Analysis Identifies "All-Star Team" of Chinese Cities



The top eight "all-star" cities and their respective total PITI scores are: Hefei (66.6), Shanghai (56.5), Shaoxing (52.6), Shenzhen (51.1), Kunming (49.5), Beijing (49.1), Taizhou (48.4), and Lian Yungang (27).

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Collaborating to Address Global Warming

Achieving transparency in the area of greenhouse gas emissions reductions remains a critical prerequisite to reaching an international climate agreement. Western critics have questioned whether China is capable of undertaking measurable, reportable, and verifiable actions to reduce its emissions due to weak implementation of and compliance with environmental laws and a lack of capacity to monitor pollution emissions.

While difficulties do exist, the passage of the national information disclosure regulations and the results of the initial PITI evaluation show that China's central government and a number of cities have recognized the importance of environmental transparency to improving compliance with its environmental laws. Continuing improvements in environmental disclosure at the local level will strengthen China's ability to implement policies to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and make these reductions transparent.