



CBCnews | World

IN THE NEWS

- Parliament's back
- Franklin expedition
- Sable Island treasure
- Northern lights

- Home
 - World
 - Canada
 - Politics
 - Business
 - Health
 - Arts & Entertainment
 - Technology & Science
 - Community
 - Weather
 - Video
- World Photo Galleries

Importing air pollution from China

Mercury from Asia contributes 20 to 30 per cent of the poison deposited in U.S.

By Andrew Lee, CBC News | Posted: Sep 21, 2014 1:04 PM ET | Last Updated: Sep 22, 2014 5:17 AM ET



China's air problem 2:47

537 shares



Perhaps the best explanation I have heard about China's air problem is from Karl Pilkington, famous as the blunt-talking star of the Sky Television series *Idiot Abroad*.

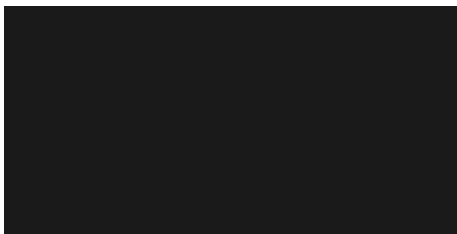
Pilkington had just landed — and looking outside, asks the camera operator following him, "Is it cloudy or is it pollution... it's not worth having in HD is it? Nothing looks crisp. Everything is sort of hazy.... like some sort of Kate Bush video or something."

- China pollution so bad Panasonic pays extra to work there
- Record smog in China closes schools, roads
- Beijing's 'Aircocalypse' - CBC's 'The National'
- Air pollution kills 7 million people every year says WHO

I ran into another bitter Brit in Tiananmen Square, who had a very expensive Nikon with even more expensive lenses. He was fuming that he couldn't take a clear picture. Every picture was hazy. He said all the megapixels and pricey glass won't fix that.

I tried to explain to him the best photos were of the pollution but that didn't sit well with him as he wanted to take photos like the brochures of China's amazing monuments — images, which are almost always retouched, with a clear blue sky as a background.

Stories like this aren't news to Dan Jaffe, a professor of atmospheric and environmental chemistry at the University of Washington. He



Stay Connected with CBC News

- Mobile
- Facebook
- Podcasts
- Twitter
- Alerts
- Newsletter



Must Watch



Ray Boisvert interview

5:32

The former assistant director of intelligence at CSIS talks about the ISIS threat to Canada



White House intruder

1:50

CBC's Lyndsay Duncombe asked to leave White House sidewalk as security stepped up after intruder scales fence



RAW Typhoon Fung-Wong hits China

1:23

Eastern China slammed with strong winds and rain from typhoon



RAW Syrian refugees cross Turkey border

1:33

Shots of hundreds of Syrian refugees crossing the Turkish border

Most Viewed

- Nude celebrity photo leak: More images posted to

finds

- Global investors push for carbon pricing ahead of UN climate summit
- Global warming dials up our risks, UN report says
- Climate change: 4 countries that are fighting the trend
- Formula E racing is in infancy but will drive broader innovation

follows air in Asia closely. More precisely, he follows it as it travels around the world and comes to North America.



"We know this pollution impacts all the way from Alaska down to Southern California," said Jaffe. "It takes five to eight days for air that is over China to arrive in the United States [depending on the wind]."

What the wind brings

From a mountain-top facility on Mount Bachelor in Oregon, they have been analyzing what the wind brings them.

"We've documented long-range transportation of pollutants to North America. What we know is that mercury from Asia contributes 20 to 30 per cent of the mercury that is deposited here in the United States."

He goes on to list an array of other toxic chemicals, "carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide, sulfur. A whole witches' brew of pollutants, including ozone, gets moved across."

Jaffe knows what many people do not — the smog that makes headlines in Beijing or Shanghai does not stop at the edge of those mega cities.

Giant swathes of China, both rural and urban, are regularly cloaked in air pollution. I once travelled 1,200 kilometres from Beijing to Shanghai by rail and never left dense smog. People in China longingly speak of "blue sky days." When people show their vacation pictures from abroad they show pictures of the sky and people marvel about the clarity of the air.

I asked a woman in a Beijing park about the air on a typical day last week and she responded, "It's bad, can it be good?" Her friend argued: "Today is OK. It's cloudy but not hazardous [the worst air quality level]."



A bad air day in Beijing. China is the number one producer of greenhouse gases. The country has doubled its use of coal-fired plants since 2003. (CBC News)

Hu Xiaohu, a young university student, was sitting nearby and offered this perspective. "I come from Xingtai, I think the air is much better than in my hometown" (Xingtai has the worst air pollution in China). He says it's rare to see the sun and "at night, I've never seen stars."

Xingtai is a coal-mining hub and has a massive coal-fired electrical plant. It only had 38 days when the air met Chinese national standards in 2013.

Coal consumption doubles

China hungrily consumes coal, and since 2003, it has doubled its coal use. Mercury is released into the air when coal is burned.

Xia Yishan is with the China Energy Strategy Research Centre at China's Institute of International Studies and is an expert on energy.

"Our country's coal production is number one in the world, the percentage of coal energy consumption is also number one." China is also the No. 1 producer of greenhouse gases as well.

While there is some talk that China's coal consumption has peaked, Xia Yishan says it may still increase a little then stabilize. Currently, China burns about as much coal as the rest of the world combined. Xia says that China has started to burn coal more efficiently in some cases.

Dan Jaffe has noticed less sulfur in his measurements of what comes over the Pacific. Yet, he says that is one of the easier pollutants to clean. Others are more

'The air goes around the planet in three weeks. So something that happens on one continent — you are

online forums

- Stephen Harper condemns ISIS audio urging attacks on Canadians
- Pennsylvania multi-car crash leaves 4 children, 1 adult dead
- Importing air pollution from China 680
- Alex Salmond says Scotland's voters 'tricked' out of independence 317
- Jennifer Lawrence among celebrity victims in leak of nude photos 737
- Ebola outbreak: Sierra Leone lockdown not extended
- Ebola outbreak: Burial team attacked in Sierra Leone amid 3-day lockdown 212
- ISIS drives thousands of Syrians across border to Turkey 276
- ISIS advance in Syria sparks 'refugee wave' in Turkey 367



The National

Canada's destination for original journalism and stories with added depth and context.



The Exchange with Amanda Lang

The day's biggest business stories. Weeknights at 7 p.m. ET on CBC News Network

Our iPad® and iPhone® apps are iOS 8 ready

Download on the App Store

challenging.

“The hard one is carbon dioxide, which is global warming. They are harder and more expensive to control and nobody is doing it yet.”

going to feel the effect.’

- Dan Jaffe, professor of atmospheric and environmental chemistry

“We have one planet,” says Jaffe. “The air goes around the planet in three weeks. So something that happens on one continent — you are going to feel the effect.”

Jaffe ended our interview with a stark warning about what may come. Even if China caps its coal consumption, other countries are lining up to burn more coal.

“If India starts developing coal plants in the same way China has ... I think we really have a big problem on our hands”

It is predicted that India’s production of coal-fired electricity will triple by 2020 and Asia’s use of coal-fired energy will increase by 50 per cent (Source: *Coal-fired Boilers: World Analysis and Forecast published by the McIlvaine Company. 2013*).

Xia Yishan knows “the pollution issue is without borders.”



[Report Typo](#)

[Send Feedback](#)

Comments on this story are moderated according to our [Submission Guidelines](#). Comments are welcome while open. We reserve the right to close comments at any time.

[Login](#) | [Signup](#)

680 Comments

Commenting on this article has been closed.

Follow

Newest



The Dark Canuck

End Free Trade - End Useless Chinese Imports

6 hours ago 6 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Terry Marshall

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We know all this stuff and we know better than to predict the unpredictable future. If North Americans all quit spending, we won't order up any electronic and plastic trinkets from China so then we save the world...OK...you go first...

7 hours ago 0 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



The Dark Canuck

End Free Trade - End Crappy Chinese Imports

7 hours ago 2 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Loyalist

In the end climate change will impact South East China region the most...so yeah keeping pumping out that crappy lawn furniture and frying pans.

7 hours ago 1 Like

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Gekko G. GG

China manufactures majority of the consumer goods and export to the rest of the world. If the rest of the world manufacture those goods on their own rather than relying on China, then the pollution will go down for China, but vice versa the pollution everywhere else will go up.

7 hours ago 3 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Arquero

@Gekko G. GG - One of the few refreshingly simple, but obviously logical thoughts on this topic. Thanks

6 hours ago 1 Like

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Scorpion_Saga

Would you like a gas mask to go with your Wal-Mart experience?

8 hours ago 2 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



cupoftea

Manufactured products made in China been shipped and used by the western world, so the pollution should be shared by them as well, don't complain.

8 hours ago 6 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



NoKoolaid

With the new Canada-China FIPA agreement, what's to stop Chinese companies from investing in Canada and building toxic waste dumps here to ship their toxic waste to Canada? Nothing really, FIPA pretty well guarantees they can do this kind of stuff or they can sue the pants off of governments and municipalities here that try to stop it. Oh, and our environmental laws can't be used to stop it.

9 hours ago 7 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Arquero

@NoKoolaid ... when it comes to building toxic waster dumps Canada takes a back seat to no one: Tar Sands, Mount Polly tailings pond disaster, Georgia Straights chlorine triangle from pulp mills

6 hours ago 0 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Sensible_Sam

Given we love the 2 dollar sandals, it's only appropriate we get the fall out as well.

9 hours ago 8 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



vernba

I guess that we Canadian's can be proud of contributing to this pollution with our massive "tar sands" exports to China. Mr. Harper's Conservatives can be truly pleased.

10 hours ago 8 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



Habsfan21

@vernba
This article is about coal, not oil.

9 hours ago 0 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)



snowshoe

@Habsfan21

It's about dinosaur crap and other fossil fuels..

6 hours ago 0 Likes

[Like](#) [Share](#)

[Show More](#)

[Submission Policy](#)

Note: The CBC does not necessarily endorse any of the views posted. By submitting your comments, you acknowledge that CBC has the right to reproduce, broadcast and publicize those comments or any part thereof in any manner whatsoever. Please note that comments are moderated and published according to our [submission guidelines](#).

Don't Miss



Web2PDF

[converted by Web2PDFConvert.com](http://converted.by/Web2PDFConvert.com)

LIVE
New Brunswick election: Polls close across the province

UPDATED
Raymond Lee Caissie, 43, charged with murder of Serena Vermeersch

Canadian wireless costs among highest in world, PC Mag finds

GO PUBLIC
Ottawa blocks Canadian from getting Syrian husband out of danger

STORIFY
Michelle Rempel responds to ISIS threat with #SecureBedroomSelfie

UPDATED
White House intruder had more than 800 rounds of ammo in car, prosecutor says

Revo...
Gove...
disclo...



CBC.ca

Aboriginal
Books
Contests
Digital Archives
Documentaries
Kids
Kids' CBC Preschool

Music
News
Parents
Program Guide
Radio
Sports
Television

Subscriptions
CBC Player
CBC Shop

CORPORATE

About CBC
Transparency and Accountability
Jobs
Production Facilities
Mobile Production Rentals
Ombudsman
CBC: Get the Facts
Independent Producers

Public Appearances
Pitch a Radio or Audio Program
Program and Content Sales
Archive Sales
Educational Sales
Image Research Library & Still Photos
Consumer Recordings
Digital TV

STAY CONNECTED

MOBILE | RSS | PODCASTS | MEMBER SERVICES: NEWSLETTERS & ALERTS

[Terms Of Use](#)
[Reuse & Permissions](#)
[Advertise](#)
[Privacy](#)
[Site Map](#)
[Help](#)
[Contact Us](#)

Copyright © CBC 2014


Radio-Canada
cbc.radio-canada.ca
cbc.ca
radio-canada.ca