

# Chinese Officials Reportedly Shut Some Businesses As Pollution Soars

BY STUART LEAVENWORTH  
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BEIJING — China's capital region remained swathed Monday in a cloud of choking smog, prompting a rise in hospital visits and sales of indoor air purifiers and reports of rare industry shutdowns.

China's Ministry of Environmental Protection on Sunday dispatched inspection teams to fine and shut down polluting industries in the region, and there were reports that regulators had idled a major concrete kiln and other factories outside Beijing.

But the shutdowns did little to end a four-day bout of heavy particulate smog. Nor are they likely to ameliorate skepticism among residents and outside experts about China's commitment to environmental protection.

Alex Wang, who teaches law at the University of California, Los Angeles, said China had extensive environmental laws on the books and an increasingly sophisticated ability to monitor sources of smog.

"The problem is not a lack of knowledge about pollution sources," said Wang, who previously headed the Beijing office of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Rather, the problem is that environmental regulators lack sufficient authority to deter polluters from violating the law."

Beijing's 5 million vehicles are an increasing contributor to the city's air pollution, but the biggest sources are thought to be industries, smelters and utilities outside the city that use coal as a power source.

On Beijing's worst days, the smell of coal soot hangs heavy in the air. At 6 p.m. Monday, the air monitor at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing reported that levels of so-called PM 2.5 contaminants — fine particles produced by coal burning that pose the worst risk to human health — had topped 400 micrograms per

cubic meter. That's about 16 times higher than the World Health Organization deems safe, and about five times higher than recent soot levels in Los Angeles.

Beijing's recent smog bout started more than a week ago and intensified Friday, when authorities issued a code orange alert, reserved for heavy smog that lasts for at least three consecutive days. It was the first time authorities had issued such an alert since they established the color-code system — with red reserved for the absolute worst conditions — last October.

While Beijing residents are accustomed to periods of filthy air every winter, the latest pall is testing the patience of many in the city.

"Beijing's air is so bad," one Beijing blogger, Ming Hui, wrote on Sina Weibo, China's version of Twitter. "What are the relevant government departments doing? ... Should enterprises and businesses that emit pollutants buy air purifiers for the people?"

According to a report Sunday in the Beijing Morning Post, the number of people going to the respiratory wards of various hospitals in the city has increased 20 percent to 50 percent since Friday. On the street Monday, pedestrians outfitted in masks were far more visible than the week before, although a large number — mainly men — wore no protection and could be seen enjoying the outdoors by lighting up cigarettes.

Health-minded Beijingers have good reason to be skeptical about continuing official pledges to protect their lungs. While China has shown that it can clamp down on emissions — it did during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing — the government's ambitious industrial growth targets, powered by the world's largest consumption of coal, trump its environmental goals. And far too often, Wang and other experts say, the government doesn't



STUART LEAVENWORTH/MCT  
China's landmark CCTV building, where state television is housed, could barely be seen in this photo of pedestrians walking near the Guomao subway station in Beijing Monday. The CCTV building is one of the city's most recognized pieces of architecture.

want to risk blowback from industries or even citizens by enforcing environmental laws.

China's widely publicized pollution is blamed for a drop in tourism last year, and industries facing shutdowns on smoggy days complain that they can't remain competitive. Yet the smog appears to be good for one industry: businesses that sell air purifiers. State-run China National Radio, quoting a store employee, reported Monday that sales of the machines had tripled at one Beijing electronics

store in the last few days.

More than one Weibo blogger on Monday extolled the benefits of using air purifiers, which can cost more than 15,000 yuan — \$2,500 — in major Chinese cities.

"Now I'm sitting in front of it and breathing in as much as I can," wrote Pink Lipstick 2011. "I want to squeeze out the haze I breathed in the lungs yesterday, and put fresh air in."

## City

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that year one of the move is successful," he added. "We do not see this as a recurring request. Beer sales and sponsors hopefully will drive the numbers so that we can re-invest in the future."

Last month, Ribfest organizers appeared before the commission to share their plan of moving the event from downtown Yankton to Memorial Park, as well as from September to June.

In response, the commission authorized the city manager to reserve Memorial Park for Ribfest June 7 and to continue to offer in-kind support to the event as the city has in the past.

Commissioner David Knoff recalled that the city had halted annual funding to Historic Downtown Yankton several years ago.

"One of the recollections I have when we decided to cut funding was ... if they have particular events, we would look at those," he said. "I tend to think that a \$6,800 request to get a stage like that makes a huge difference for the event and the sky is the limit by bringing this to Memorial Park. Personally, I think that is a pretty economical investment for what we get back in the potential that this event has given that time of year."

Questions were raised about whether the city ever provided funding to Riverboat Days and if the city should look at purchasing a portable stage so that any entity could utilize it. The consensus on both questions was "no."

A motion to provide the \$6,800 out of the city's bed, board and booze (BBB) tax fund was approved on a 7-1 vote. Commissioner Brad Woerner abstained because he is a Ribfest organizer. Commissioner Pauline Aklund cast the no vote.

In other business Monday, the commission:

- consented to beginning the annual city-wide cleanup Saturday, April 5;
- approved a letter of support for Habitat for Humanity of Yankton County to construct single-family homes at 906 Locust Street and 903 Pearl Street should the organization attain financial assistance it needs from the South Dakota Housing Development Authority;

- awarded a \$1.2 million contract to Feimer Construction of Yankton for storm sewer and pavement replacement along Mulberry Street from 23rd Street to Donahoe Boulevard — as well as pavement replacement along 23rd Street from Douglas Avenue to Mulberry Street; and

- approved a request to the South Dakota Department of Transportation to hire Brosz Engineering to do a bi-annual inspection of the city's 12 bridges.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at [twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage](https://twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage). Discuss this story at [www.yankton.net/](http://www.yankton.net/).

## Deaths

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the men's deaths represent a very personal loss.

"Some of our athletes knew these two gentlemen more than I did," she said. "Over the years, they had competition together and headed their delegations. They bonded around the whole event."

Johnson and Kollars had spent Saturday at the southeast area basketball tournament in Yankton, Clayton said. Kollars was playing in the tournament, while Johnson was an assistant coach.

The news of Saturday's fatal accident spread quickly, Clayton said.

"I received calls from two or three people, asking if I had heard about their deaths," she said. "I heard about it Sunday, but I know of someone who had heard about it late Saturday. The Special Olympics community is pretty close knit, and word does travel fast."

The Yankton delegation is reaching out to all those who knew Johnson and Kollars, she said.

"We are sending our condolences to the families and friends of both these young men, and that would include their Special Olympics family and friends, as well," she said.

That feeling of family was reinforced by last Saturday's tournament, which determined state qualifiers, Clayton said.

"This tournament really means a lot to all of them," she said. "We probably had over 30 teams here, and we had some who were just doing skills, where they were shooting hoops."

Clayton pointed to the apparent satisfaction that Special Olympics brought for Johnson and Kollars.

"Special Olympics is very important to these athletes,"

she said. "You can just see by reading the obituaries of both of these young men, they were very involved in all facets of Special Olympics out of Sioux Falls for many years, and not just basketball."

The 28-year-old Kollars was an Eagle Scout, a graduate of Lincoln High School, a member of Toastmasters and a Special Olympics athlete.

More than 100 people had left messages by Monday night on a Facebook page created for the remembrance and celebration of Kollars' life. The messages came from classmates, fellow Scouts and others sharing a special bond.

A bowling teammate requested Kollars' bowling shoes and a ball to place on a seat in his honor at their Wednesday night bowling league.

One woman remembered Kollars' compassion as he expressed concern for her cancer recovery.

"Whenever I would talk to him he would ask me how I was doing with my cancer. He always remember(ed) to ask me," she said.

"Whenever they would come to our house, he had golf balls with breast cancer ribbons on them, and a couple times he brought me a pig (not a live one) because he knew I collected them."

"I now have another (angel) in heaven praying for my cancer to go away."

The 30-year-old Johnson graduated from Lincoln High School and was employed by Hy-Vee at the time of his death. He loved cars and watching the races. He was a member of the Mustang Club. He also enjoyed four-wheeling and spending time with his family and friends.

Johnson participated in several events in the Special Olympics, including softball, basketball and bowling.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of Johnson, Kollars and other Special Olympians is the example and inspira-

tion they provide to others, Clayton said. That example means forming friendships with all types of people, including those who may be different than everyone else.

And in the end, friendship and bonding — not medals and trophies — represent the true meaning and spirit behind Special Olympics, Clayton said.

"It's not whether you won or lost, but that you got to compete and got to meet

new friends," she said.

And now, with last Saturday's tragic accident, Special Olympians in Yankton and across the state have lost two of those friends.

- Johnson's funeral will be held at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Salem with burial to follow in the church cemetery. A prayer service will be held at 7 p.m. today (Tuesday) at Kinzley

Funeral Home in Salem with family present from 6-8 p.m.

Memorials may be sent to Special Olympics South Dakota, 800 E-190 Ln, Sioux Falls, SD, 57104.

- Kollars' funeral will be held at 10:30 a.m. Thursday at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Sioux Falls with burial to follow at Woodlawn Cemetery. Visitation with family present will begin at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday with a Scripture vigil at 7 p.m., both

at the church.

Memorials may be designated to Sioux Falls Special Olympics PO Box 90127 Sioux Falls SD 57109 or in care of Barnett-Lewis Funeral Home.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at [twitter.com/RDockendorf](https://twitter.com/RDockendorf). Discuss this story at [www.yankton.net/](http://www.yankton.net/).



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WEEKDAYS MONDAY-FRIDAY

**Tuesday, February 25**  
7:40 am The Center (Christy Hauer)  
8:20 am MMC Trap Shooting (Rick Kaslow)  
8:45 am Dakota Museum (Crystal Nelson)

**Wednesday, February 26**  
7:40 am YHS Topics (Bret Johnson, JJ Hejna, Ryan Olson)  
8:20 am Hy-Vee Foods (Chef Staci)  
8:45 am Mount Marty (Kristi Tacke)