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Construction Halted Ahead of Games

By [ANDREW JACOBS](#)

BEIJING — City officials laid out an ambitious series of measures on Monday that will freeze construction projects, slow down steel production and shut down quarries in and around this capital during the summer in an attempt to clear the air for the Olympics. Even spray-painting outdoors will be banned during the weeks before and after sporting events, which begin here on Aug. 8.

Although officials initially suggested that the city's wholesale transformation would be complete long before the opening ceremonies, the announcement nonetheless represents the most detailed plan yet for how Beijing might reach its longstanding pledge to stage "green Games" in one of the world's most polluted cities. In the past, officials had suggested that the city's makeover would be completed well before the Games, possibly by the end of 2007.

But the two-month construction ban announced Monday will instead begin on July 20. Government directives will also force coal-burning power plants to reduce their emissions by 30 percent through most of the summer. Officials said 19 heavily polluting enterprises, including steel mills, coke plants and refineries, would be temporarily mothballed or forced to reduce production.

Gas pumps that do not have vapor-trapping devices will be closed, cement production will stop and the use of toxic solvents outdoors will be forbidden.

If Beijing's air remains unacceptably sullied in the days leading up the Games, officials said, they would take "stringent steps" to curb polluting industries, although they declined to say what those might be. "We will do everything possible to honor the promise," Du Shaozhong, deputy director of the city's Environmental Protection Bureau, told reporters. "Just tell everybody they don't have to worry."

Some Olympic officials and athletes remain unpersuaded. Although the government has made notable strides in reducing the brown haze from coal-burning heaters and stoves, the unabated surge in car ownership has erased many of those gains. There are about 3.5 million vehicles choking Beijing's roadways, with about 1,200 new cars joining the honking parade each day.

Last August, in a four-day exercise that will probably be repeated this summer, authorities forced more than half of Beijing's cars and trucks off the road. Officials said they would present plans to restrict traffic later.

In recent months, independent scientists who have sampled Beijing's air have said levels of ozone and particulate matter from diesel engines remain five times as high as maximum standards set by the [World Health Organization](#).

The president of the [International Olympic Committee](#), [Jacques Rogge](#), said a particularly smoggy day could

prompt officials to postpone outdoor endurance events.

Mr. Du, the environmental official, dismissed suggestions that Beijing had failed to substantially reduce harmful pollution. He said that the number of Blue Sky days, those with acceptably clean air according to the city's monitoring system, has more than doubled since 1998. There were just 100 such days then, he said, compared with 246 last year. He said levels of nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide had dropped significantly in recent years.

However, an independent study released in January by an American environmental consultant, Steven Q. Andrews, found irregularities in the monitoring system that cast doubt as to how much air quality had actually improved.

The authorities said they had reduced pollution by forcing local factories to upgrade pollution-control equipment and compelling about 200 of the most hopelessly noxious ones to shut down for good. Even on a day when the horizon was notably hazy and the fumes from idling cars undeniably acrid, Mr. Du urged a roomful of reporters to tell the public how much better Beijing's air had become in recent years. "Please assure all the athletes," he said.

But even if they find the city's air cleaner than expected, visitors may be disappointed by the indoor environment. Earlier in the day, government officials announced that a proposed smoking ban, which is to take effect on May 1, had been modified in the face of opposition by business owners. Smoking will be restricted in hospitals, schools and stadiums, but it will be permitted in bars and restaurants.

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