

waste from township and village enterprises is rarely treated.⁵²

The combination of township enterprise pollution activities and the leadership's interest in economic growth has some clear environmental implications. First, township enterprises have helped absorb excess rural labour, thus preventing an even larger number of otherwise unemployed workers from moving into urban areas. As urban centres will be unable to absorb China's expanding labour supply, TVEs will play an increasingly important role in maintaining social stability. Furthermore, TVEs contribute heavily to local tax revenue. Thus, there is strong local pressure for these enterprises to prosper, even if engaged in polluting activities.⁵³ Second, as the Chinese leadership would like less of a gap between incomes in internal and coastal areas, in order to contribute to social stability, it is likely that growth of township enterprises will be encouraged. Such growth is likely to exacerbate rural environmental problems and add to what has been described as "tremendous damage to rural environments and general public health."⁵⁴

Air quality in China varies greatly, but in many cities it is poor. Energy use, vehicular emissions and industrial production, as well as natural sources, contribute to atmospheric pollution. Significant health risks arise from exposure to suspended particulate matter (SPM), lead and sulfur dioxide. Poor health, such as heart disease in older people, and inadequate nutrition are also likely to make populations more vulnerable to the effects of air pollution.⁵⁵ Data from Chinese official sources and the United Nations' Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) frequently report air quality to be significantly lower than Chinese and World Health Organization (WHO) standards.⁵⁶

Air quality is directly related to China's energy consumption patterns.

⁵²ibid. p.161

⁵³World Bank, "China Environmental Strategy Paper," Report No. 9669-CHA, 1992, p.20.

⁵⁴Qu Geping and Li Jinchang, translated by Jiang Baozhong and Gu Ran, Population and the Environment in China, 1994, p. 161.

⁵⁵World Bank, World Development Report 1992, p. 51.

⁵⁶For example, the annual average total suspended particles have recently been 526 micrograms/m³ in the north of China and 318 micrograms/m³ in the south, compared with WHO guidelines of 60-90 micrograms/m³. Sulfur dioxide levels of 93 micrograms/m³ in the north and 119 micrograms/m³ in the south are about twice the WHO guidelines of 40-60 micrograms/m³. World Bank, "China Environmental Strategy Paper," Report No. 9669-CHA, 1992, p.16.