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PRESS RELEASE

CHINESE LEGISLATOR CALLS FOR BETTER ENFORCEMENT OF POLLUTION LAW

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Chen Zhili, vice chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) and a senior Chinese legislator has called for reforms to improve enforcement of the law requiring environmental impact assessments of major industrial projects before they are approved.

Pollution assessment bodies must be independent of the government in order to establish clear national standards for environmental assessments, said Chen. The Environmental Impact Assessment Law (2003) had helped to reduce pollution over the past five years. However, Chen criticized "some local governments" for approving projects before they had passed the environmental assessment or had failed to supervise the implementation of environmental measures required by the assessment. Chen further criticized the lack of punishment of government officials, found to be responsible for some pollution cases. A set of national standards would help local environmental departments deal with the growing number of proposals requiring assessment, she said.

In 2007, environmental officials at all levels assessed 280,000 projects nationwide. Guangdong Province turned down 4,811 projects that failed to meet the law's requirements. Shandong Province has closed all small paper mills having a capacity of less than 50,000 tons per year. Independent assessment agencies would also make prosecutions of those who violated the law easier and fairer, Chen said. "It is difficult to guarantee the fairness of the assessment, if the current system is not reformed," Chen told the Fifth Session of the 11th NPC Standing Committee, reporting on the law.

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