

FINANCIAL TIMES

Welcome to FT.com, the global source of business news and analysis. Register now to receive 8 free articles per month.

November 14, 2012 9:04 am

Hong Kong fails on pollution targets

By Paul J Davies in Hong Kong



Hong Kong has persistently and significantly exceeded its own targets on air pollution limits since they were first set in 1987, according to a report released on Wednesday from the government audit office.

Air pollution in Hong Kong is a constant source of complaint and frustration among the population and – along with the scarcity of school places – one of the most significant factors that discourages or even prevents some people moving to the place that bills itself “Asia’s world city”.

Christine Loh, the undersecretary for the environment, said the Hong Kong government accepted all the findings of the report and pledged it would tackle the problems with new targets, incentives and potential penalties for commercial and public transport and shipping in the city.

Last year the roadside annual average concentration of nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matters with a diameter of 10 micrometres or less (PM10), exceeded the government’s own air quality objectives by 53 per cent and 11 per cent respectively, according to the report. It added that both measures exceeded the World Health Organisation limits by 205 per cent.

The PM10 levels were more than three times those of Sydney, and more than double levels in London and New York.

Ms Loh, who is part of the new administration under city chief executive Chun-ying Leung, said that the current government had already begun to do more about air pollution.

“CY Leung has put air quality management as part of public health, which is a significant and articulate change in policy,” she told the Financial Times. “This means we are not just talking about emissions reduction, but linking it to health policy.”

The government is preparing reports on the real impact on health from pollution and has already begun discussions with big polluters ahead of plans to alter legislation in 2015.

But Ms Loh added that Hong Kong had a particular set of problems because of its very high density population, traffic, and its tall buildings and narrow streets, which trap emissions.

The government is looking at subsidising catalytic converters for the hundreds of ageing diesel buses in the city as well as incentives for commercial heavy truck operators to renew their fleets.

Ms Loh said that future government announcements would detail some sticks as well as carrots for some of these industries as well as for shipping, although she noted that some shipping companies were already operating a voluntary clean-fuel scheme for when their boats were in port.

Arthur Bowring, of the Hong Kong shipowners’ association, said the voluntary scheme would run out at the end of this year, but that the incentives offered by the government in March to encourage ships to continue using cleaner fuel in port only covered 30-40 per cent of the cost.

“Our aim is for regulation for Hong Kong and for the whole Pearl River Delta, to ensure that individual companies and Hong Kong as a port, do not become uncompetitive,” he said. “[Without that] I don’t hold out much hope for voluntary initiatives to be sustained.”

Printed from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0d984a9c-2e25-11e2-8bb3-00144feabdc0.html>

Print a single copy of this article for personal use. Contact us if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

© THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2012 FT and ‘Financial Times’ are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.