



Premier Wen Jiabao has promised to use an “iron hand” this summer to make his nation more energy efficient. The central government has ordered cities to close inefficient factories by September, like the vast Guangzhou Steel mill here, where most of the 6,000 workers will be laid off or pushed into early retirement.

Already, in the last three years, China has shut down more than a thousand older coal-fired power plants that used technology of the sort still common in the United States.

China has also surpassed the rest of the world as the biggest investor in wind turbines and other clean energy technology. And it has dictated tough new energy standards for lighting and gas mileage for cars.

But even as Beijing imposes the world’s most rigorous national energy campaign, the effort is being overwhelmed by the billionfold demands of Chinese consumers.

Chinese and Western energy experts worry that China’s energy challenge could become the world’s problem — possibly dooming any international efforts to place meaningful limits on global warming.

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