

A NEW KIND OF BUILDING
An artist's rendering shows the Nanjing Green Towers, which will have 1,100 trees planted on their balconies.

COURTESY STEFANO BOERI ARCHITETTI



TREES, PLEASE

China is growing new solutions in its fight against pollution.

China is known for its long history, rich culture, and cute pandas. It's also known for some of the worst air quality in the world. But the Asian country is now wielding a natural weapon against air pollution—trees.

In February, China's government announced plans to cover at least 32,400 square miles with forest by the end of 2018. That is about the size of Ireland. Some 60,000

soldiers have been dispatched for the massive tree-planting campaign.

Most of the trees will be planted in Hebei Province. That is an area surrounding China's capital, Beijing. The initiative is part of a larger effort to increase the amount of land covered by forest, from 21.7% in 2016 to 23% in 2020.

Huang Wei is an environmentalist who works for Greenpeace East Asia. She is optimistic about the forestry campaign. "Trees act as a sink to absorb carbon dioxide and other pollutants," she told TFK. Carbon dioxide is a gas that traps the Earth's

heat and contributes to global warming.

Why is China's air filled with toxic chemicals? In large part, it's because of the country's reliance on coal-fired power plants. When coal is burned, PM2.5 is produced. PM2.5 is a pollutant that can cause shortness of breath, heart attacks, and even death.

Just two years ago, pollution levels were so high in Beijing that schools and factories had to close. Huang hopes China's tree-planting plan will reduce the nation's "suffering from air pollution."

BUILDING GREEN

The Chinese government is getting help from others in its drive to make the nation greener. An Italian architect and urban planner, Stefano Boeri, is leading an effort to build vertical forests in the country.

Boeri's designs have already taken root in the city of Nanjing, China, where the Nanjing Green Towers (pictured) are under construction. Funded by the state-owned National Investment Group, the buildings consist of two towers. Thousands of trees and hanging plants will grow on their balconies and rooftops.

What's more, Boeri has been selected to design a forest city in Liuzhou. It will consist of numerous plant-covered buildings with more than a million plants soaking up air pollutants.

Boeri says his goal is to design buildings that help the environment and improve air quality. He also hopes to encourage a new generation of green architects.

"I always tell kids that trees are their best friends," Boeri told TFK. "This is because trees improve the quality of air that they breathe." The Chinese hope more trees will help the country breathe easier.

—Rebecca Mordechai

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