



Comment

Time for China to go for the gold in energy efficiency

The Beijing Olympics are over and China rocked the world from the very start of the games, beginning on the lucky day of 8/8/08, with 2008 drummers performing in the opening ceremonies. China spent a record US\$41 billion on perhaps the most remarkable and spectacular Olympic Games ever held and earned more gold medals than any other country with 51. And while these Olympics may be remembered for record achievements of athletic prowess, such as Michael Phelps and his unprecedented eight gold medals, they will also be remembered for athletes arriving wearing masks out of concern for the quality of the air and the potential damage to their performance and health.

Interestingly, China recently also earned the gold as the top emitter of carbon dioxide, taking the top spot from the United States. Although the air quality during the Olympics was generally considered good, it took Herculean efforts to get it there in time for the arrival of the 400,000 tourists to the city. Beijing took half of its 3.3 million cars off the road and shut down or curtailed production and energy use at numerous factories, buildings and power plants.

China's incredible economic growth in recent years has moved it in contention for a bronze medal as it is soon to overtake Germany as the world's third largest economy based on GDP. This economic growth has been driven by increased energy consumption and environmental degradation. However, in the first half of 2007, energy consumption per unit of GDP decreased as China has paid greater attention to energy effi-

ciency. A key component to future efficiency gains is through greater deployment of combined heat and power (CHP), which currently accounts for about 13.5% of China's electricity.

China showed the world that it has the means and will to build masterpieces of sustainable design as venues for the recently concluded Olympics. This attention to efficiency and sustainability needs to, and will, accelerate, out of economic necessity and political reality. The people of Beijing have seen the clear skies of the Olympic Games and will not want to move back to the future.

While the Olympic flame may be out in China, a cleaner and more sustainable flame of clean and decentralized power systems may prove to be the real legacy of these Games.

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