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Article Launched: 07/29/2006 12:00:00 AM PDT

L.A.'s big import: Overseas pollution

25% of particulates from China

BY BRENT HOPKINS Staff Writer

The brilliant scarlet tones of a smoggy Los Angeles sunset may look pretty, but air quality experts maintain they actually herald a new Red Menace.

More than 6,000 miles from the City of Angels, Chinese factories produce toys, shoes, household goods, tools and all manner of everyday necessities.

They're also producing pollution, dust, soot, sulfur and metal that hop the Pacific Ocean and end up in the air Angelenos breathe. According to one estimate, up to a quarter of the particulates clogging up the city's already-dirty air come from China.

"Who would have thought that this would be the communist invasion?" laughed Martin Schlageter, campaign director for Coalition for Clean Air.

While his tone was jovial, he didn't find the subject particularly funny. A recent report by the Santa Monica-based Natural Resources Defense Council said China builds one new coal-fired plant each week. The soot belched forth will shortly account for one-third of the smog-forming air pollution in California, the council said.

The Associated Press cited an Environmental Protection Agency study that says 25 percent of the particulates in Los Angeles air originate from China. Within 15 years, the NRDC says that pollution will quadruple.

"NRDC and other environmental groups recognized long ago that unless we help China solve some of its problems, everyone in the world's going to end up suffering from it," said Daniel Hinerfeld, a spokesman for the NRDC.

"The world is a lot smaller than we realize. Our atmosphere is so thin ... industrial activity in China can blow across the ocean and affect our air all the way here in Los Angeles."

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According to the EPA, China also accounts for 40 percent of the world's cement production, a major source of dioxin in the air. Additionally, the University of Washington has detected ozone, carbon monoxide, mercury and particulate matter from Asia at multiple sites in the Pacific Northwest.

"We understand that China is an emerging and vibrant member of the global economy," said EPA spokesman Francisco Arcaute. "We are working with China to see they reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases."

While the EPA works with its counterpart organization in China to limit dioxin and coal-plant emissions, it's a delicate balance. The American economy relies so heavily upon Chinese manufacturers, asking too stridently for constraints on

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its factories could produce a chill on low-cost exports that keep prices low at the mall.

"We're exporting our manufacturing pollution problem to China," said Schlageter, "then importing it right back in."

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