

《中国致力于防治荒漠化》

11月25日，一场巨大的沙尘暴袭击了中国西北部城市张掖，形成了一道100米高的沙墙。强风从附近的戈壁沙漠卷起沙子和灰尘，很快，这个拥有120万人口的城市几乎完全被灰尘吞没。能见度降低到10米以下，地方政府启动了应急计划。



On November 25, a huge sandstorm hit China's northwestern city of Zhangye with a 100-meter-high sand wall. Strong winds whipped up sand and dust from the nearby Gobi Desert and soon the city of 1.2 million people was almost totally engulfed in the dust. The visibility was reduced to less than 10 meters and an emergency response plan was activated by local authorities.

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The horrifying sandstorm not only brings the dust but also puts the problem of desertification once again under the spotlight.

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Desertification is the gradual transformation of habitable land to arid land, usually caused by climate change and/or the improper use of land. It is one of the most important environmental challenges that the world faces today.

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According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), more than 100 countries – principally in the Sahel, Central, and East Asia are affected by desertification.

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In China, a country undergoing fast economic development but with nearly 20 percent of its land area as desert, desertification has become one of the country's most urgent and important environmental problems.

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With a growing population and drier climate, the challenges also increase. The three most serious desertification areas in China are the western Horqin sandy land, the Maowusu Desert and its surrounding areas as well as the western and southern Tarim Basin.

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Compared with 1975, the desert area of China has expanded 21,000 square miles (54,390 square kilometers) – approximately equal to the size of Croatia. Many so-called "ecological refugees" have been relocated because of desertification.

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In spite of this, China is known for its continuous effort to slow or reverse desert growth. The UNCCD even calls China "a champion in the fight against desertification."

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One of the country's major initiatives to restore land is the Three-North Shelterbelt program, also known as the "Green Great Wall of China." It is designed to prevent the desert from encroaching into the grassland and farmland by planting trees.

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According to statistics, an average of 4,400 square kilometers of China's desertified land have been restored annually since 2000. The pace may be slow, but the expansion of some deserts has been reversed.

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