

《Seven Chinese officials jailed for manipulating air quality》

Seven environmental protection officials in Xi'an, northwest China's Shaanxi Province, have been sentenced to jail for tampering with air sampling equipment and manipulating environmental monitoring data, a local court announced on Friday.



The seven officials at the court hearing on Friday. /Chinese Business View Photo

The case was first exposed in April last year, after the China National Environmental Monitoring Center (CNEMC) in Beijing detected abnormal data activity from two air quality monitoring stations in Xi'an.

An inspection team was soon dispatched to carry out investigation, since the two district-level stations in Chang'an and Yanliang were directly monitored and managed by the CNEMC.



The China National Environmental Monitoring Center (CNEMC) is located in Beijing. /VCG Photo

According to the findings of the investigation, two directors of the local environmental protection bureaus, He Limin and Tang Lixing, had ordered their subordinates at the monitoring stations to clog the detectors of air sampling equipment with cotton, filtering pollutants and forging better air quality results.



The environmental monitoring station in Chang'an district, Xi'an. /Chinese Business View Photo

Air sampling equipment are used to record real-time data of local air quality, collecting data including density of nitrogen dioxide, PM2.5 and PM10 concentrations.

The CNEMC and the country's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) starting sharing data collected from stations across the country as early as 2010 in response to growing public concern over pollution control. Under normal conditions, no one is permitted to enter monitoring stations or tamper with the sampling machines.



Air sampling equipment at the CNEMC. /VCG Photo

However, in February last year, Chang'an monitoring station was relocated. Then its director He Limin took the chance, got hold of the keys to the facility, recorded the sampling machine's password and ordered his assistants to manipulate data. Another local director Tang Lixing followed his suit.

After causing multiple abnormal machine activities and affecting national-level data records, their illegal action was eventually exposed. Seven associated officials were taken into custody.

Initially, given no existing laws regulating protection of air quality data, the former officials were detained for damaging computer data.

Starting January 1 this year, however, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate enforced a legal interpretation regarding criminal cases of environmental pollution. It states that those who tamper, forge or change air quality monitoring data would face criminal charges.



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based on their behaviors, all the seven officials were sentenced to imprisonment, from one year and three months to one year and seven months.