

## Missing Sun

Pollution in many of the world's cities is becoming a major health problem. One of the worst affected is Beijing, the capital of China. Air quality was dangerously low on fifty-eight days last year. The winter months are especially bad. This is the time of year when more coal is burned to heat people's homes. There is also less wind to blow the smog away. At this time of year, pollution levels are sometimes twenty times higher than the WHO (World Health Organization) considers safe. This causes illnesses and on the worst days old people and children are advised to stay indoors. Visibility is sometimes so bad that motorways have to close because of the danger of accidents. In early 2014, some newspapers and websites showed a frightening vision of the future. On a smoggy morning, residents of Beijing watched the sunrise. However, as the real one was hidden, they had to do this on giant TV screens. The smog was so thick that the real sunrise was completely invisible. While this might seem shocking, the film of the sunrise was nothing unusual. The screens show adverts all the time. The one that the people were watching that morning was for a holiday company. The same advert is shown quite often, whatever the weather. Either the photographer was lucky or he knew exactly how the image would look and waited until he got the photo he wanted. Although the news reporting was inaccurate, it might have done something to raise awareness of how bad the problem has become. Politicians, too, have finally decided that something must be done to reduce pollution levels. The first idea is to reduce the amount of coal that people use. Factories will also be moved to areas further away from cities. Another target is older, more polluting cars. The worst offenders will be banned. In their place, greener and cleaner forms of transport will be encouraged. Will these changes help? The Chinese know from experience that it is possible to improve air quality very quickly if necessary. Before the 2008 Olympic Games, pollution in Beijing was reduced greatly. As well as reducing traffic levels and closing factories, other methods to reduce pollution were used. These included pouring water onto roads to reduce the amount of dust flying in the air. To help with this, scientists were even able to make clouds drop more rain. Since then, things have got worse rather than better but, at last, the government seems to be determined to do something about the problem. For the people of Beijing and other large cities, this will make a huge difference in their lives.