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## Researchers warn bureaucracy fueling China's safe water problems

WASHINGTON -- The kind of top-down bureaucracy that can discourage communication and hobble some Western corporations is fueling widespread problems with China's water supply, with lessons for the rest of the world, researchers reported on Thursday.

So-called stovepipe bureaucracy — where different departments communicate with their own teams and managers but not with others that might be related — makes it harder for China to deal with critical water sustainability issues, the scientists wrote in the current edition of the journal Science.

The problems of ample supplies of safe, clean water in China are formidable, and may offer a preview for other developed and developing nations in a century where water has been dubbed “the new oil,” the resource on which civilization may turn.

“I think this is a big lesson for the rest of the world, because the world is facing the same problems that China has with the complex relationships among water, energy, land, food and other things,” said co-author Jianguo Liu of the Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability at Michigan State University.

He acknowledged that the stovepipe bureaucracy adds to the challenge over water sustainability in China.

Two-thirds of China's 669 cities have water shortages, over 40 percent of its rivers are severely polluted, 80 percent of its lakes suffer from eutrophication — an over-supply of nutrients, often a result of fertilizer run-off from farmland — and about 300 million rural residents lack access to safe drinking water, the researchers reported.

The authors praised China's commitment, made in January 2011, to spur water conservation and manage this crucial resource within this decade.

But the researchers said this commitment won't be enough unless disparate agencies learn to communicate and coordinate with each other. They described a web of government entities with seemingly contradictory missions, and actions that appear to go against one policy as they promote another.

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