Building Green in BEIJING

For two weeks in August, the Beijing Olympic Village was the temporary home of more than 16,000 athletes, coaches, and officials from around the world.

A project of that scale had the potential to be a huge drain on the environment. But NRDC saw the Olympics instead as an opportunity to promote green building technology. We worked with Olympics officials to make sure that the project featured extremely high energy and water efficiency, full-scale use of renewable energy, extensive use of recycled materials, and a zero-emissions reception center. Thanks to these cutting-edge green building techniques, the Olympic Village was awarded LEED-ND Gold certification, one of the world's highest grades for environmental community design. The environmental benefits reached the entire city—our green building strategies eliminated 8,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions in Beijing during the Games and will continue to prevent emissions of about 670,000 tons each year. That staggering amount of pollution avoided is the equivalent of taking 268,000 cars off the road each year.

Jin Ruidong, NRDC's China green buildings project director, helped create the environmentally friendly Olympic Village.

And our green building work in China did not end with the closing ceremonies. NRDC is partnering with Chinese officials to implement a national green building standard for China, just as we did for the United States more than eight years ago when we helped create LEED standards for buildings. Since then, LEED has been used to certify more than 2,500 residential and commercial projects in the United States and around the world. NRDC is also working with China to implement its national energy efficiency program for buildings, which will reduce energy use in every nonresidential building in the country by hiring energy managers, monitoring energy consumption, overseeing government procurement, and submitting annual progress reports. Moreover, to make it even easier to build green around the globe, our NRDC China team is working with Chinese and U.S. residential real estate groups to standardize the methodology used to rate buildings on their energy performance.

We already have a proven record of success in bringing green building technologies to China: NRDC managed the development of the nation's first internationally certified green building, which uses only about one-quarter of the energy and produces just 40 percent of the wastewater of a typical Beijing office building—at no greater cost to construct. The building, known as Agenda 21, was such a success that China's Ministry of Construction awarded NRDC its Green Building Innovation Award—the first green building award China has ever given. As a result of the building's popularity, NRDC was asked to help develop an energy efficiency learning center to promote successful green building strategies.

China's Ministry of Construction awarded NRDC its first national green building award.

NRDC's green building work in China began in 1996. We started by going straight to the people we knew could make a difference: provincial governments and policymakers. What began with NRDC advising local administrators about energy efficiency codes and building regulations, quickly progressed into our scientists and efficiency experts becoming national leaders on cutting-edge green building techniques. Most recently, we've partnered with Shanghai—the most developed city in China—to retrofit 59 million square meters of existing buildings to comply with new efficiency standards by 2010. We're also advising the city on developing a market-oriented ratings system that will allow efficiency savings to be factored in to real estate property valuations.

"Q&A"

An Interview with Barbara Finamore,

Director of NRDC's China Program

Q: When did NRDC first become active in China, and how did you get involved?

A: After working for the United Nations on China's Sustainable Development Blueprint for the 21st Century, I returned to the United States—knowing the expertise NRDC could bring and the challenges China faced—and immediately began pushing for an NRDC program in China, which came to be in 1996.

Q: How has China changed in the last two decades?

A: A better question might be, "How hasn't China changed?" When I arrived in 1990 there really weren't any private cars—just bicycles, buses, and government vehicles—and no high-rise buildings. Now buildings come and go so fast that I can get lost in neighborhoods I once knew well! And the smog in urban areas can be hard to believe. One day you might be able to see clear across the city and the next day it's like staring into a kitten's fur.

Q: How does NRDC's work in China support our domestic policy goals?

A: Critics at home often say we can't do anything to solve global warming because China isn't doing anything. NRDC's successful efforts to develop alternative energy sources and increase energy efficiency all boost the potential for international cooperation to address the climate crisis—and take the wind out of those race-to-the-bottom arguments.

Q: What is the most satisfying aspect of your work in China?

A: Beyond the nuts-and-bolts improvements we're seeing at all levels when it comes to energy efficiency, I'd have to say it's the growing environmental awareness in China—especially among young people—that gives me the most hope for our shared future. And our fantastic team in China deserves a good chunk of the credit!

"We have an ability to think five or ten generations out. One of the goals is to create a 'greenprint' for planet Earth."

NRDC Trustee **Maya Lin** speaks about her connection to our China work in the NRDC film *China Greenprint*. Watch it online at **www.nrdc.org/china**.