



Artificial snowstorm brings chaos to Beijing

Updated Wed 11 Nov 2009, 2:27am

Chinese scientists have artificially induced the second major snowstorm to wreak havoc in Beijing this season, state media said, reigniting debate over the practice of tinkering with Mother Nature.

After the earliest snow to hit the capital in 22 years fell on November 1, the capital has again been shrouded in white, with more snow expected in the coming three days, the National Meteorological Centre said.

The China Daily, citing an unnamed official, said the Beijing Weather Modification Office had artificially induced both storms by seeding clouds with chemicals, a practice that can increase precipitation by up to 20 per cent.

The office refused to comment on the report when contacted. On Tuesday, an official had said the storm was "natural".

City weather officials have previously said that such methods are aimed at alleviating a drought over much of north China, including Beijing, that has lingered for more than a decade.

But residents have griped about the flight delays, traffic snarls, cancelled classes and other inconveniences of a surprise snow storm, saying officials could warn them if they are planning to toy with the clouds.

Beyond the day-to-day hassles, experts were reported as saying the weather manipulation had other undesirable side effects in the longer term.



PHOTO: An artificially induced snow storm blanketed Beijing, shrouding China's capital in white.
(Frederic J Brown: AFP)

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"No one can tell how much weather manipulation will change the sky," said Xiao Gang, a professor in the Institute of Atmospheric Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"We should not depend too much on artificial measures to get rain or snow, because there are too many uncertainties up in the sky."

Zhao Nan, a Beijing engineer, was quoted as saying more than 5,500 tonnes of erosive snow-melting chloride used on city roads - nearly half the annual allotment - could "erode steel structures of buildings".

In 2005, the snow-melting agent was reportedly responsible for killing 10,000 trees in Beijing and ruining 200,000 square metres of grassland.

Despite a massive effort to clear the capital of snow that involved over 15,000 workers, many roads remained blocked, while highways into Beijing and in neighbouring Hebei and Shanxi provinces were closed, state press reports said.

- AFP

Topics: snowfall, weather, china

First posted Wed 11 Nov 2009, 1:44am