Science, technology for clean lungs make advancements

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On smoggy days, parents in China are most concerned about protecting their children from breathing in the bad air. But a safe, effective and child-friendly respirator takes years to develop, according to industry experts.  
"Children's facial structures can be unique," said Stephen Shafer, president of 3M Greater China Area. "So our job is to make respirators to fit their faces that come in different sizes, otherwise the respirators won't work."  
The new 3M children's respirator, designed for children aged 7-14, was launched this winter. The product is said to have undergone comprehensive leakage tests to ensure it protects users from dangerous particles in air.  
To make a product that can be used by 7-year-olds, as against 12-year-olds previously, was no mean feat, because of the strict requirement of fit and comfort.  
But the Shafer-led 3M has been pressing ahead with its efforts to get close to Chinese consumers. Its focus is shifting from industrial use to consumer-centric products for safety and healthcare.  
"Historically, 3M has had a lot of industrial businesses in China and has been a leader in industrial products," said Shafer, an MBA from Harvard University.  
"With air quality becoming a major concern in China in recent years, we have realized that the technology we use to become a leader in industrial safety is a perfect technology for helping mitigate the impact of air quality in China as well," he said. "It is natural for us to bring the core filter media technology to consumer applications."  
Shafer joined 3M in 2010 and worked as vice-president of 3M business transformation prior to his current position. He is upbeat about 3M's performance in China.  
"3M has grown in sync with China's economic development," he said. "Our business is evolving from serving industrial manufacturing, infrastructure and the safety market to making more consumer and healthcare products."  
In the third quarter of last year, 3M sales generated $8.2 billion globally, which was a 6 percent growth over same period last year. As a result of strong performance through the first nine months, 3M forecasts organic sales growth of 4 to 5 percent for full year 2017, up from previous guidance of 3 to 5 percent.  
And part of the growth is expected to come from the Chinese market, its largest overseas market, as affluent Chinese consumers have increasingly strong demand for healthier lives and a better environment.  
"In the short run, products that can improve air quality and people' lives will become a good market in China and it is important for us to serve that market," said Shafer.  
3M has launched various types of respiratory protection products, from respirators that fit Chinese consumers' faces and filter PM2.5 pollutants, to home and vehicle air purifiers.

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