

Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology, Press Review, 01/2011

For more information please contact: Ms. Pham Thi Viet Ha (hapham2310@gmail.com)

No	Title	Date	Source	Region	Catalogue	Description
1	Oil slick dirties-tourist beach	5/1/2011	VN news	Danang	Environment	Thousands of blobs of oil have washed up on a one-kilometre stretch of My Khe Beach in Da Nang.
2	UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun delivers balanced package of decisions	7/1/2011	UNDP news	Cancun	Environment	The UN Climate Change Conference in Cancún, Mexico, ended with the adoption of a balanced package of decisions that sets all governments more firmly on the path towards a low-emissions future and supports enhanced action on climate change in the developing world
3	Hanoi adopts measures to protect giant turtle	8/1/2011	Vietnam Plus	Hanoi	Environment	Hanoi municipal authorities have approved solutions to wipe out invasive red-eared turtles in Hoan Kiem lake in order to protect the environment for the giant turtle linked to legendary Kim Quy the Turtle.
4	Environmental violations soar 43%	10/1/2011	VN news	HCM	Environment	The number of violations of environmental law increased by 43 per cent in 2010 compared to 2009, according to the Ministry of Public Security
5	Waste energy to be used for cement production	10/1/2011	Vietnam Plus	HCM	Waste	Holcim Vietnam Cement Ltd., Co will develop a facility which produces electricity from waste energy for cement production at its Hon Chong cement plant
6	Protecting Hoan Kiem's famed soft-shell turtle	11/1/2011	VN news	Hanoi	Environment	Hanoi is taking measures to counter red-ear turtles which are threatening the legendary soft shell turtle living in Hoan Kiem Lake.



MOST-BMBF Office for
Water+Environmental Technology

**Vietnamese – German Office for Water and Environmental Technology
funded by MOST and BMBF**

Address: 25 Le Thanh Tong, Hoan Kiem, Ha Noi

Tel/Fax: + 84 4 3933 5124

Website: www.vn-ger-wateroffice.vn

Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology, Press Review, 01/2011

For more information please contact: Ms. Pham Thi Viet Ha (hapham2310@gmail.com)

7	Hai Duong suffers from water pollution	11/1/2011	VN news	Hai Duong	Pollution	Untreated waste water from the industrial zones has been discharged into the canal serving as the main sewer gate of Hai Duong City
8	Concern grows about care of legendary Ha Noi turtle	11/1/2011	VN news	Hanoi	Environment	There is increasing public concern over the safety of the legendary Hoan Kiem Lake turtle which has suffered numerous cuts inflicted by those who have tried to catch him
9	Long An's waters suffer from factory waste	13/1/2011	VN news	Long An	Waste	A tributary of Dong Nai River and other waterways sweep in waste from HCM City and nearby provinces and cause heavy pollution in the Mekong Delta province of Long An
10	Hanoi: Rich men pay hundreds of USD for breakfast	18/1/2011	VFEJ	Hanoi	Hanoi's Living	Unhygienic food is now a big problem in Vietnam. Some rich people are willing to pay a lot of money to have meals at luxurious restaurants to have safe food
11	City agency promotes green awareness	18/1/2011	VN news	HCM	Environment	A programme organised by HCM City's Environmental Protection Agency saw around 1.25 million people joining various community-based environmental protection activities and several hundred thousands more increasing their environmental awareness in the last five years
12	65 percent of wells in Red River Delta unsafe	19/1/2011	VFEJ	Red River Delta	Pollution	Around 65 percent of wells in Vietnam's Red River Delta contain arsenic, manganese, selenium and barium at unsafe levels, posing a serious health threat to about 7 million people, according to a research done by Swiss scientists, released on January 17.

**WATER
OFFICE**

MOST-BMBF Office for
Water+Environmental Technology

**Vietnamese – German Office for Water and Environmental Technology
funded by MOST and BMBF**

Address: 25 Le Thanh Tong, Hoan Kiem, Ha Noi

Tel/Fax: + 84 4 3933 5124

Website: www.vn-ger-wateroffice.vn

Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology, Press Review, 01/2011

For more information please contact: Ms. Pham Thi Viet Ha (hapham2310@gmail.com)

13	Park plan hits land rights snag	26/1/2011	VN news	HCM	Environment	The lack of investment and land shortages in different areas have stymied HCM City's plans to build and upgrade green parks, officials say
14	Industrial parks fail to treat wastewater	26/1/2011	VN news	Binh Duong	Environment	Inspectors from the Viet Nam Environment Administration have found that many industrial parks in southern Binh Duong Province have been discharging untreated waste water into the environment
15	VN, Laos, Thailand to protect Mekong	27/1/2011	VN news	HCM	Water	Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand yesterday reached an agreement to protect water quality in the Mekong River against emerging threats



MOST-BMBF Office for
Water+Environmental Technology

**Vietnamese – German Office for Water and Environmental Technology
funded by MOST and BMBF**

Address: 25 Le Thanh Tong, Hoan Kiem, Ha Noi

Tel/Fax: + 84 4 3933 5124

Website: www.vn-ger-wateroffice.vn

Oil slick dirties-tourist beach

DA NANG —Thousands of blobs of oil have washed up on a one-kilometre stretch of My Khe Beach in Da Nang.

The oil started appearing on Sunday, said Phan Minh Hai, deputy head of Da Nang Eco Tourist Sea Board.

Hai said that the oil might have come from offshore ships and the prevailing north-east winds had blown it onshore.

The board has asked an environment company to clean up the mess.

Pollution causes fish deaths in Cai River

DONG NAI — Up to 20 tonnes of red tilapia and carp bred on rafts in Cai River in southern Dong Nai Province's Bien Hoa Town, Hiep Hoa Commune have died as the result of water pollution.

Wastewater from surrounding settlements and factories polluted the river, local authorities said.

About 200 tonnes fish died in three wards in Hiep Hoa Commune last June, resulting in a loss of VND10 billion(US\$500,000). Over 10 tonnes died in December. — VNS

UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun delivers balanced package of decisions

Ha Noi, 20 December 2010 – The UN Climate Change Conference in Cancún, Mexico, ended with the adoption of a balanced package of decisions that sets all governments more firmly on the path towards a low-emissions future and supports enhanced action on climate change in the developing world. The package, dubbed the ‘Cancún Agreements’, was welcomed to loud and prolonged applause in the final plenary. The Government of Viet Nam has hailed the Cancún Agreements as an important step forward.



“Cancún has done its job. The beacon of hope has been reignited and faith in the multilateral climate change process to deliver results has been restored,” said UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres at the close of the conference.

Nations launched a set of initiatives and institutions to protect the poor and the vulnerable from climate change and to deploy the money and technology that developing countries need to plan and build their own sustainable futures. And they agreed to launch concrete action to preserve forests in developing nations.

They also agreed that countries need to work to stay below a two degree Celcius mean global temperature rise and set a clear timetable for review, to ensure that global action is adequate to meet the emerging reality of climate change. However, critics point out that the ‘below two degree’ target is too weak and that the Cancún Agreements are only one step because current emission reduction commitments fall well short of what is needed, even for the two degree target.

At the conference, the Vietnamese delegation included officials from the ministries of natural resources and environment, foreign affairs, agriculture and rural development, and planning and investment. The delegation worked as a member of the ‘Group of 77 and China’ and made interventions on a number of different topics.

There will be a critical role to play for the UN and other multilateral organizations in designing the new institutions and implementing the agreements, particularly in terms of building and strengthening the wide range of capacities that are needed in developing countries.

More specific elements of the Cancún Agreements include:

- Industrialised country targets are officially recognised under the multilateral process and these countries are to develop low-carbon development plans and strategies and assess how best to meet them.
- Developing country actions to reduce emissions are officially recognised under the multilateral process. A registry is to be set up to record and match developing country mitigation actions to finance and technology support from industrialised countries.
- The Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanisms has been strengthened to drive more investments and technology into environmentally sound and sustainable emission reduction projects in the developing world.
- A total of US\$30 billion in fast start finance from industrialised countries to support climate action in the developing world up to 2012 and the intention to raise US\$100 billion annually from 2020 is included in the decisions. Also, a process to design a Green Climate Fund is established.
- Governments agreed to boost action to curb emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries with technological and financial support – establishing a formal REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) mechanism. REDD is important for Viet Nam because it could help improve the quality of Viet Nam’s forests, as well as strengthen the livelihoods of people and communities who are dependent on forests.

For more on the climate change conference, see the UNFCCC website: <http://unfccc.int>

Hanoi adopts measures to protect giant turtle

(VietnamPlus)-Hanoi municipal authorities have approved solutions to wipe out invasive red-eared turtles in Hoan Kiem lake in order to protect the environment for the giant turtle linked to legendary Kim Quy the Turtle.



The move is considered as urgent, to prevent the risky spread of the invaders in the lake, especially when photos of the giant turtle with a red-eared turtle on its shell and new injuries allegedly caused by the alien species were recently shown publicly.

The red-eared turtles (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), ranked as one of the most invasive species in the world, are alien species from the southern United States .

Provisional measures to catch and destroy existing red-eared turtles in Hoan Kiem lake are underwater cages, floats with bait and netting, along with ensuring an eco-friendly environment and preserving the scenery of the lake.

In addition, a study of optimum placement for traps and pilot catches in a test lake will be conducted.

Long-term solutions are development of an education and dissemination plan on the alien species' negative impacts for Hoan Kiem lake's environment and related documents to ban all activities relating to red-eared turtles' trade, circulation, transport and breeding.

To curb the rise of the alien population, people are encouraged to not release the turtles and other alien species into the lake. All violations will be punished and egg-laying areas of the alien species may be destroyed.

Hanoi also decided to set up a co-ordinating group, including representatives from the services of science and technology, natural resources and environment, agriculture and rural development, the Hoan Kiem People's Committee, Hoan Kiem Lake management board and other relevant units.

The giant turtle species, one of a handful of giant Red River soft-shelled turtles (*Rafetus swinhoei* or *Rafetus leloi*) left in the world, has been known since at least the third century BC when Kim Quy advised King An Duong Vuong on the best way to build defensive walls around Co Loa, the then capital, upstream from Hanoi .

Amid the horn-honking bustle of Vietnam 's capital, Hoan Kiem Lake is an oasis of relative calm. It attracts tourists and locals alike, the luckiest of whom occasionally catch a glimpse of "the turtle", the most famous resident of the capital.

Turtles are important in Vietnamese culture, particularly the Ho Guom (Hoan Kiem) turtle. It is so rare it is believed only four may be left in the world. Legend has it that after beating a Chinese invasion with a sacred sword found in Hoan Kiem Lake by a fisherman, King Le Loi handed it back to Kim Quy the turtle. In fact, in Vietnamese, the name of the lake means "Returning Sword."

Environmental violations soar 43%

HCM CITY — The number of violations of environmental law increased by 43 per cent in 2010 compared to 2009, according to the Ministry of Public Security.

The Environmental Crime Prevention and Fighting Police Department said there were more than 6,500 violations of the Environmental Law nationwide, and 88 of them resulted in lawsuits.

The number of violations involving discharged untreated wastewater and hazardous gas accounted for 22 per cent.

Police said that many factories were still using an underground pipe network to discharge untreated wastewater into river and canals.

Only 20 per cent of hospitals nationwide have standard waste treatment systems.

Many hospitals had not been treating their wastes according to regulations on medical waste treatment.

Rubbish treatment dumps, especially in city outskirts, are faced with an overload of rubbish and outdated technology.

Importing industrial waste from other countries has also complicated matters.

In Hai Phong alone, authorities have discovered hundreds of containers of imported garbage, including radioactive materials.

Collection and transport, as well as illegal treatment of hazardous waste, such as old lead batteries, waste sludge and waste from metal ore, have occurred in some localities.

Nineteen per cent of the violations were related to illegal exploitation of natural resources and mines, including bauxite exploitation in Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands).

The total fines were more than VND52 billion (US\$2.6 million), police said.

According to department leaders, violators' methods have become more and more sophisticated, causing difficulties in enforcement.

Penalties for violations of the environmental law in some localities have been inconsistent and not strict.

The regulations on violations in the law are unclear and vague, leaving loopholes that violators exploit, they said. — VNS

Waste energy to be used for cement production

(VietnamPlus)-Holcim Vietnam Cement Ltd., Co will develop a facility which produces electricity from waste energy for cement production at its Hon Chong cement plant, located in the Mekong delta province of Kien Giang , in early February, 2011.



Addressing at a Jan. 10 press briefing in HCM City, Holcim Vietnam's Director General Gerhard Schutz said the 6.3 MW facility will use heat of exhaust fumes from the cement kiln system to produce electricity.

The facility is expected to help reduce power consumption from the national power grid, harmful impacts to environment as well as production costs, Gerhard Schutz noted.

The project will be constructed at a total cost of 28 million USD, of which 10 million USD will be used for maintenance.

Once operational, slated for August, 2012, the facility will churn out about 44 million kWh per year, sufficient to ensure electricity for 88 days of operation of Hon Chong cement plant, saving more than 9,000 tonnes of coal and reducing 25,300 tonnes of CO₂ discharged each year.

Protecting Hoan Kiem's famed soft-shell turtle

(Dtinews)-Hanoi is taking measures to counter red-ear turtles which are threatening the legendary soft shell turtle living in Hoan Kiem Lake.

Ngo Thi Thanh Hang, Vice Chairman of the municipal People's Committee, has just approved the measures proposed by the city's Department of Science and Technology.

Initially, the city will catch red-ear turtles, one of the most dangerous invasive species in the world, by using cages put under water, floating rafts and nets. In addition, the city will disseminate information about negative impacts of red-ear turtles for the lake's ecosystem, ban all activities of red-turtle trading, storage and transport while exploring areas in which this kind of animal can lay eggs.

A taskforce, including representatives from the Department of Information and Technology, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and several other agencies will be set up eliminate red-ear turtles.

Despite being approved, these solutions will be carried out after the Lunar New Year because they need to be exercised with great caution, according to a representative from the Department of Science and Technology.

Dr. Nguyen Dinh Hoe, Head of the Central Public Debate under the Vietnam Association for Conservation of Nature and Environment, said the top measure is prohibiting people from releasing red-ear turtles into the lake. He added that the solutions are suitable but can also be a risk for the legendary turtle.

Nguyen Minh Tuan, head of the Sword Lake (Hoan Kiem) management board, said that the massive infiltration of red ear turtles in the lake began in 2009.

Professor Ha Dinh Duc, an expert on this species, said that after eating the algae in the lake, red-ear turtles will attack the legendary turtle when they find it difficult to seek food, causing serious injury.

He also warned that in years to come, these turtles could devour all the algae in the lake and even all the plant life. He also believed that this destructive species of turtles was increasing in numbers and would soon overtake all existing living creatures in the lake.

The legendary turtle is very important in Vietnamese culture. It is reclusive and rare and considered holy because of a 15th-century legend that claims King Le Loi drove out invading Chinese with a magical sword, which the gods gave him and which he later returned by giving it to the lake's turtle, which swam it back to the gods.

Hai Duong suffers from water pollution

HAI DUONG — Untreated waste water from the industrial zones has been discharged into the canal serving as the main sewer gate of Hai Duong City. The water then flows to the Thai Binh River. Although the canal has been polluted for the past ten years, authorities have yet to find an effective way to solve the problem. The added pollution in the 3km T2 canal has been coming from factories, enterprises and co-operatives of the Ngo Quyen and Cam Thuong industrial zones. Approximately 65cu.m of waste water is dumped each day. Vu Van Anh, a resident in Cam Thuong Ward, said, "In the summer the canal smells terrible and on rainy days the sewage overflows to nearby houses." He also said that since industrial zones began discharging the untreated waste water, the canal's water has turned a blackish colour, is constantly bubbling up and has become very condensed. Not fit for pigs "In previous years, the wild water morning glories along the canal were verdant and many people took them for their pigs and chickens, but now no one would dare take these vegetables," Anh said. Local residents have begged the ward authorities to take action and continue to be told that a water treatment factory is in the works, but nothing has been built. Aside from the strong stench and poor aesthetics of the canal, residents worry about an even bigger problem: polluted drinking water as the sewer gate is only 300m from the city's main source of clean water, the Cam Thuong Clean Water Manufacture Factory. Chairman of the Cam Thuong People's Committee Vu Dinh Hung said that his family had personally been affected by the pollution: "Our tap-water often has yellowish dregs." Hung bought a 500 litre tank to filter water but said the ward had not come up with a viable solution. In 2007 the committee drafted a request to the city People's Committee and the provincial Department of Environmental Protection to build a sewer system in the Viet Hoa and Cam Thuong wards and prohibit enterprises from discharging the toxic fluids. But the request fell on deaf ears. Pham Anh Duong, director of the An Phat Plastic Manufacture Company, one of only two enterprises with water treatment systems, said her company invested VND20 million (\$1,000) in the system. "Installing the system was necessary and I decided that in the first few days of the company's founding," she said. Director of of the provincial Department of Environmental Protection Vu Dinh Hien said most local enterprises had not established these systems because they had not invested in the proper infrastructure. "We've investigated enterprises who've violated waste discharge regulations but violations are always repeated because punishments are not strict enough," he said. Violating enterprises were fined up to VND10 million (US\$500). "We cannot raise the fine because it is based on a public regulation," Hien said. In 2006, the department proposed to the city People's Committee to move the entrance to the sewer away from the clean water plant to avoid polluting the clean water. But, according to Hien, the city lacked appropriate funding for the project, which would require about VND10 billion (US\$500,000). Deputy Chairwoman of the Hai Duong People's Committee Dang Thi Bich Lien agreed with Hien attributing inaction to a lack of funds. — VNS

Concern grows about care of legendary Ha Noi turtle

HA NOI — There is increasing public concern over the safety of the legendary Hoan Kiem Lake turtle which has suffered numerous cuts inflicted by those who have tried to catch him.

Officials also say the turtle is under threat from invasive red-eared turtles that have proliferated in Returned Sword Lake.

"I feel very sorry for the legendary turtle who has suffered many injuries. It is also very cold at this time of year," Hanoian Bui Minh Duc said.

He said authorities should have taken steps to eradicate red-eared turtles when they first appeared in the country's waterways. Instead, he said they only planned to do something about the red-ear infestation in Hoan Kiem Lake in the lunar new year.

Officials plan to eradicate red-eared turtles in Hoan Kiem Lake using baited cages.

Hoang Hai from Thua Thien-Hue City said time was of the essence because eradicating red-eared turtles in the lake could not be done overnight.

"Everyone knows it will not be easy to wipe out the red-eared turtles. Why don't they move the turtle to a safe place and treat its injuries," he said.

The fabled Kim Quy Turtle is precious to Ha Noi because of the legend surrounding it. Every effort should be made to protect it, Hai said.

Do Thi Anh Ngoc from HCM City agreed with Hai. He said the turtle – one of just four such turtles left in the world – should be moved to Dong Mo Lake, where there is another giant turtle.

"Hoan Kiem Lake turtle is not only a national treasure but held dear by every Vietnamese person," Ngoc said. "It will be a crime if this turtle's life cannot be saved."

Meanwhile, associate professor Pham Binh Quyen, director of the Sustainable Environment Development Institute, said the municipal People's Committee's decision to try and wipe out the non-native red-eared turtles in the lunar new year was a prudent move.

"The injuries sustained by the Hoan Kiem Lake turtle are ominous. Caution should be exercised," Duc said.

Turtles are a cultural icon here in Viet Nam, particularly the one in Hoan Kiem Lake. Legend has it that King Le Loi helped repel invading Chinese forces with a sword presented to him by God.

He later returned the sword to the turtle in the lake. In fact Hoan Kiem means "Returning sword."

Officials from the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Hoan Kiem district People's Committee and the Hoan Kiem Lake Management Board will spearhead efforts to wipe out the red-eared turtles.

Ngo Thi Thanh Hang, deputy chairwoman of Ha Noi Municipal People's Committee, has asked the department to ensure the lake's ecological balance is not harmed by efforts to protect the giant turtle.

In addition, the city will disseminate information about the negative impacts of red-eared turtles on the lake's ecosystem and ban trade and transport of red-eared turtles.

"It is heart-rending to hear the legendary turtle has sustained so many injuries," said Hanoian Nguyen Giang Nam. "We must protect the turtle as soon as possible." — VNS

Long An's waters suffer from factory waste

LONG AN — A tributary of Dong Nai River and other waterways sweep in waste from HCM City and nearby provinces and cause heavy pollution in the Mekong Delta province of Long An.

Effluents from factories in HCM City are carried along Can Giuoc and Cho Dem rivers and tributaries like the Thay Cai, An Ha and Xang and dumped in districts like Duc Hoa, Ben Luc, Can Giuoc and Can Duc. Can Giuoc is especially badly polluted by the inky-black waste from the factories.

Formerly, residents of Can Giuoc used to depend on aquaculture and ducks for their livelihood, but the creatures were unable to survive the pollution.

Residents now have to buy clean water for daily use. The situation is becoming desperate. The province is considering a project to treat 300,000 cubic metres of water a day from Bao Dinh River to supply Tan An Town. But it is likely to be given up following fears that Tan Huong Industrial Park in Tien Giang Province will discharge its waste in the river.

Manufacturing activities in Long An itself are responsible for some of the pollution, as are urban and agricultural wastes.

The province has 23 industrial parks, but only nine of them have waste treatment systems, all of which fall short of the standards set by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

The main problem is the high cost involved in installing treatment systems.

Provincial authorities have identified 200 firms causing severe pollution and given them six months to clean up their act. Failure to do so will mean penalties, including temporary closure.

Every day industrial parks and factories in Long An Province discharge 400-500 tonnes of solid waste and 50,000-70,000 cubic metres of effluents.

Pollution worsens. Pollution caused by waste from households and fertilisers and insecticides from agriculture has also reached alarming levels.

Most domestic wastes, both solid and liquid, are directly dumped into rivers.

The provincial People's Committee has for many years been calling for educating farmers in reducing the use of fertilisers and insecticides.

Not only has it been in vain, but also the pollution caused by fertilisers and insecticides of water bodies has been worsening day by day.

New measures needed Nguyen Thanh Nguyen, deputy chairman of the People's Committee, said the province was helpless in keeping out waste from HCM City and provinces like Tay Ninh and Dong Nai.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment needed to step in to tackle the pollution caused in Long An by waste from elsewhere, he said. or industrial waste generated within its borders, the province is building a 1,700ha plant in Thu Thua District to process solid industrial wastes.

But there has been widespread opposition to it from both officials and local residents. What if the huge plant leaks waste into water bodies," Nguyen Van Chau, a local resident, said.

"It will be an environmental disaster for Long An." — VNS

Hanoi: Rich men pay hundreds of USD for breakfast

(VietNamNet Bridge)-Unhygienic food is now a big problem in Vietnam. Some rich people are willing to pay a lot of money to have meals at luxurious restaurants to have safe food.



Some people often take a bowl of pho (Vietnamese noodle) which is priced VND750,000 (\$37) as breakfast. On the weekend, they take their whole family to restaurants and spend several hundreds of USD for the breakfast. For a half of the year, Thang, the owner of a real estate firm in Hanoi, has become a familiar customer of a restaurant of a hotel on Lang Ha Street. Thang goes to this restaurant to enjoy the famous pho there. The restaurant offers six types of pho, which are priced from VND 70,000 to VND750,000 dong (\$3.5-37) a bowl. At popular pho restaurants, the prices only range from VND20,000-30,000/bowl. The pho at this restaurant is very expensive because it uses special beef, which is imported from the USA, Australia and Japan. A bowl of pho with Wagyu beef from Australia is priced VND220,000 (\$11). The price is VND125,000 (\$6.5) for a pho bowl with beef imported from the US and it is up to VND500,000-VND750,000 (\$37) for pho with Kobe beef from Japan. The restaurant manager told VietNamNet that he was unexpected to see such a high number of customers who choose the most expensive kind of pho here. Notably, they order the special pho for themselves, not for guests. The price for a bowl of pho with Kobe beef is equivalent to a feast for four people. Thang, who has become a regular of this restaurant for a half year, said that he chooses restaurants to avoid food poisoning. "I don't think that I go to this restaurant to show off my wealth. It is simple that I can pay VND750,000 for a pho bowl that I think it is safe and delicious," Thang explained. Thang visits this restaurant twice or three times a week. He also takes his family, including his parents, his wife and two children to this restaurant. "The Vietnamese economy is developing strongly and there is a class of wealthy people, who don't care about money. I often see families of three generations who come to my restaurant to eat our special pho at the weekend. They pay nearly ten million dong for the breakfast," the restaurant owner said. This restaurant has special customers who have ordered the special pho for two years. They have special seats there. The restaurant has 150 seats and they are all occupied from 7-9am, the time for breakfast. Not only breakfast, wealthy men in Hanoi go to hotels to take lunch and dinner to feel safe.

Thuy Anh, PR manager of a big hotel in Hanoi, said that the hotel's restaurants previously served foreigners but now the situation has changed. Many Vietnamese people, both individuals and families, go to the hotel for meals. The hotel has had to change its menus to serve these customers. The price is at least VND650,000-700,000 for a person. The number of individuals and families going to luxurious restaurants to have safe and delicious meals is also rising. These restaurants have offered menus with a lot of vegetables and healthy food to serve the rich, who are not afraid to spend money to get the best for their health. According to the Health Ministry, the ratio of people who contract cancer in Vietnam in 2010 is 181.3/100,000 for men and 134.9/100,000 for women. In 2000, the rates were 146.6 and 101.6/100,000. The latest research conducted by the HCM City Cancer Hospital shows that one third of the cancer patients have problems with food.

Cam Quyen

City agency promotes green awareness

A programme organised by HCM City's Environmental Protection Agency saw around 1.25 million people joining various community-based environmental protection activities and several hundred thousands more increasing their environmental awareness in the last five years.

"Environmental protection has become a duty of everybody," Nguyen Van Hong, deputy director of the city Department of Natural Resources and Environment, told a conference held yesterday to review the programme.

"We co-operated with the Fatherland Front, women's, farmers, youth, veterans, and trade unions, the Union of Science and Technology Association and 24 districts since we wanted to involve everybody in environmental protection."

The city Youth Union was possibly the key player in the campaign, helping clean up more than 10,000 public places, collecting 27,000 tonnes of rubbish, and planting nearly 120,000 trees.

Around 15,000 members of mass organisations were provided with basic awareness of the environment, resolutions and laws passed in the country, and other related issues.

Information about environmental protection campaigns was spread through songs, plays and competitions, with some like Waste Recycle Day and keeping migrants' houses clean being the most popular.

"Standards have been created for environmental protection and apply to all households," Ha Van Dung, deputy head of the city Environmental Protection Agency, said.

"Environmental protection activities were encouraged and monitored through co-operation with local authorities," he said, adding the biggest hurdle faced by the programme was the shortage of money.

"Since most of our personnel were volunteers, it was hard to organise environmental protection activities as a routine," he added. —VNS

65 percent of wells in Red River Delta unsafe

Around 65 percent of wells in Vietnam's Red River Delta contain arsenic, manganese, selenium and barium at unsafe levels, posing a serious health threat to about 7 million people, according to a research done by Swiss scientists, released on January 17.

The pollution in the Red River Delta is at the same scale with Bangladesh, which is considered the worse arsenic polluted area in the world.

According to Bloomberg, the research was published in the Proceedings of the Swiss National Academy of Sciences.

Vietnamese authorities should seek alternative sources or install better treatment technology to ensure the safety of drinking water, researchers led by Michael Berg at the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology wrote in the journal.

The contamination is likely the result of pumping the water from deep aquifers for more than a century, causing naturally occurring arsenic in groundwater to seep downward, they said.

The findings are "alarming," the authors wrote.

According to researchers, the Red River Delta is one of the world's most densely populated regions, with about 1,160 people per square kilometer. Of the delta's 16.6 million people, 11 million have no access to public water and depend on other sources such as private wells, they wrote.

Berg and colleagues analyzed samples from 512 private wells between May 2005 and January 2007. Arsenic contaminates 27 percent of the region's wells and about 1 million people use water with concentrations that are five times the World Health Organization's safety standard, according to the report.

Arsenic poisoning can cause vomiting, abdominal pain, bloody diarrhea and is linked to cancer of the skin, lungs, bladder and kidney, according to the WHO. Natural arsenic contamination is "a cause for concern" in countries including Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, China, India, Mexico, Thailand and the U.S., the WHO said on its website.

Manganese is the second-greatest health concern related to the well water in Vietnam, the study found. About 44 percent of wells have unsafe levels of manganese, and an estimated 5 million people consume water with health-threatening levels of the chemical.

While manganese is needed in small quantities for the body to function correctly, chronic exposure to excessive levels may cause neurological effects.

Park plan hits land rights snag

HCM CITY – The lack of investment and land shortages in different areas have stymied HCM City's plans to build and upgrade green parks, officials say.

While the development of green parks has been accorded high priority in the city's urban growth strategy, especially in the context of serious climate change impacts, implementation has proceeded at a tardy pace.

A report reviewing activities of the city's Department of Transportation and Communication last year showed that they were confined to maintaining and upgrading existing parks, making little or no headway in developing new ones. The main reason for this is that there is no investment for projects to build new green parks, according to Nguyen Thi Hien Luong, who oversees the department's green parks development plans.

The investment for building new parks includes compensation paid for land clearance. An official with the HCM City Green Park Company said investors typically preferred projects that had to do with easing traffic jams and flooding. Luong said another reason for the investment dearth was the backlog in planning that had affected the city's green park project for 15 years. The estimated costs and implementation schedule for the project had not been approved, said Luong.

"Without detailed plans and investment estimates, the project cannot appeal to investors," Luong said.

The lack of investment has, in turn, considerably slowed the land clearance process. The Sai Gon Safari Green Park Project in the city's suburban district of Cu Chi is an example. There are 27 houses, one school and hundreds of grave yards yet to move because no compensation has been paid.

Some other plans to build large-scale green parks of at least 6ha have been approved as part of the city's master plan but because there has not been any investment, the land reserved for these has been encroached upon, according to Luong.

Another reason for the slow progress is the shortage of land for building new green parks. Vacant land is hard to come by in the city's 13 urban districts and it is almost zero in the central districts of 1, 3, 5, 6 and 10.

Corruption is another contributing factor to the slow implementation of the city's green park development. In a number of projects on building a new urban area, contractors benefited from the land reserved for public use. They've built tennis courts, soccer fields or other amusement facilities on land reserved for green parks.

In suburban areas, despite the availability of vacant land, local authorities cannot carry out their plans because of the usual problem - no investment. As of last October, only 11 out of 19 suburban districts had reported to the city administration their plans to develop green parks.

Encroached green space. The maintenance and upgrade of parks have also faced challenges. Most of the green parks in new urban areas are degraded and partially encroached upon for business purposes.

The department has said that it has not been able to fulfil the objective of planting new trees in the city because some of the places reserved for this have been used up by other constructions. The department has so far managed to plant only two-thirds of the 2,300 trees supposed to be planted.

The department has asked the local administrations to help address the problem but it has not received any positive feedback from them.

Since big cities and urban areas like HCM City are developing rapidly and having to deal with air and noise pollution, trees and parks become even more important parts of the solution, environmentalists have stressed. Viet Nam is considered to be among the most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts including rising sea levels, and parks with big trees in them will play a crucially important mitigating role, experts say. —

VNS

Industrial parks fail to treat wastewater

BINH DUONG — Inspectors from the Viet Nam Environment Administration have found that many industrial parks in southern Binh Duong Province have been discharging untreated waste water into the environment.

As many as 14 of 21 inspected parks were found to be releasing waste water that exceeds the permitted standards, with 10 of them discharging 10 times the allowed level, according to deputy head of the inspection team Pham Hong Son.

The results of the inspection, which took place in October and November last year, were revealed at a recent meeting between the inspectors and provincial authorities.

Major violators include Binh Duong, Song Than 2, Dong An 1, Tan Dong Hiep A and B and Viet Huong industrial parks.

Dong An 1 in Thuan An District was discovered by the local police and the environment inspectors to be severely damaging the environment — the park has been discharging about 1,000cubic metres of untreated waste each day.

Deputy director of the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment Vo Thi Ngoc Hanh said the key reason for the damage was not because industrial parks did not have adequate waste treatment facilities but because many businesses failed to make use of these facilities.

The 21 industrial parks operating in the province discharge a total amount of 49,000cu.m of industrial waste water each day.

Under the current regulations, environmental violators will be fined a maximum of VND500 million (US\$25,500) or face criminal proceedings depending on the level of their infringement. —VNS

VN, Laos, Thailand to protect Mekong

HCM CITY — Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand yesterday reached an agreement to protect water quality in the Mekong River against emerging threats.

The Procedures for Water Quality agreement, the first of its kind and sealed by environment and water ministers from the four countries at the 17th annual meeting of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Council in HCM City, seeks to safeguard the basin and prepare people and agencies to respond to environmental emergencies.

It commits the four riparian countries to adopt mutually-recognised standards for measurement, monitoring, and assessment of water quality.

Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai said in his welcome remarks that the lower Mekong Basin faces several challenges that threaten natural resources, particularly water, and the livelihoods of tens of millions of residents.

He called for an action plan for the basin to respond to climate changes while protecting the environment and the lives of millions of people downstream.

Strategic partners

He stressed the need for increased co-operation with strategic partners, including dialogue partners like mainland China and Myanmar, and developing the council into an independent manner.

The Vietnamese Government is determined to co-operate fully with other Council members to implement the 1995 Mekong Agreement and Hua Hin Declaration for sustainable development of the Mekong basin, he said.

Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Pham Khoi Nguyen, chairman of the MRC Council, also noted that climate change was a big concern in the basin, particularly rising sea levels and salinity.

The two problems would affect not only agriculture, aquaculture, and fisheries, but also the livelihood of local people.

"Our top priority will be to integrate climate change-related factors into the planning process of relevant sectors.

Jeremy Bird, chief executive officer of the Mekong River Commission, said: "This trans-boundary co-operation commitment is a major step towards securing the environmentally-sound future of the Mekong River.

"Together with implementation of the four other agreements under the 1995 Mekong Agreement, this will help bring about timely protection of both livelihoods of people and aquatic species throughout the basin."

More than 60 million people, most of them living in rural areas in the basin, depend heavily on the river for food and livelihood.

More than 60 per cent are involved in water-related occupations that are now vulnerable to environmental shocks and degradation. — VNS