

Press Review 08/2011 - Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology,

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No	Title	Date	Source	Region	Catalogue	Description
1	Poverty grows in mining areas	1/8/2011	VN News	Hoa Binh	Environment	Mining is tending to exacerbate poverty rather than alleviate it, according to the results of an 18-month study on the impacts of mining in the provinces of Hoa Binh, Phu Tho, Lao Cai, Lam Dong and Dak Lak Province conducted by the Centre for People and Nature Reconciliation in July 2009.
2	Polluter uses legal loophole to delay paying heavy fine	2/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Pollution	Industrial firms found committing grave violations in disposing of their toxic solid waste are exploiting a legal loophole to avoid or defer paying fines.
3	Flooded streets block traffic in capital city	3/8/2011	SGGP	Hanoi	Environment	Heavy rains flooded dozens of streets in Ha Noi early yesterday afternoon, making them impassable, and water overflowed from some of the lakes in the city.
4	Clean water comes to more rural areas	3/8/2011	MONRE	Khanh Hoa	Water Management	Many people in rural areas of Khanh Hoa Province previously have only well water to use.
5	Puny fines fail to deter environmental crimes	3/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Environment	Viet Nam should immediately look for ways to avoid becoming an industrial garbage dump.
6	Large irrigation project comes to a standstill	3/8/2011	MONRE	Hue	Environment	An irrigation project worth VND300 billion (USD14.55 million) in Hue Province has been postponed because of environmental threats.
7	Poor management puzzled by heavy dangerous waste	4/8/2011	SGGP	HCM	Waste	Increasing amount of dangerous waste due to fast industrialization has put a big pressure on environment protection efforts.
8	Finland pledges aid for climate change	4/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Climate Change	The Finnish Embassy in Ha Noi has earmarked 160,600 euros (US\$230,000) to help non-governmental organisations based in the south tackle climate-change challenges in Mekong Delta.



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9	New cemetery a threat to water for 10 million	5/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Water Management	A project to build a 200ha cemetery close to the Dong Nai River poses a threat to the resource that supplies clean water for over 10 million people in HCM City and Dong Nai Province.
10	Pollution problems worsen in capital	6/8/2011	VN News	Hanoi	Pollution	Environmentalists reported that pollution has recently worsened in Ha Noi, caused by solid and water waste as well as exhausts fumes.
11	Ha Noi to get building-waste dumps	6/8/2011	VN News	Hanoi	Waste Treatment	The Ha Noi People's Committee yesterday approved VND54 billion (US\$2.6 million) towards building four construction waste dumps covering a total area of over 21ha.
12	Untreated waste water found pouring into river	6/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Wastewater	A major wastewater treatment plant located in an industrial park in southern Dong Nai Province has been found discharging untreated waste water into the Dong Nai River via an underground pipeline system.
13	Dam projects require stricter assessments	8/8/2011	VN News	Dong Nai River	Environment	Experts have called for more stringent environmental and socio-economic assessment on the impact of hydro-electric dams built along and across Dong Nai River.
14	Hydro plants to face environmental checks	9/8/2011	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	MONRE said yesterday it would check on whether small and medium hydro-electric plants in 15 northern mountainous provinces complied with environmental regulations.
15	Hundreds of billions of dong spent, but people don't have clean water	11/8/2011	MONRE	Hanoi	Water	Tens of clean water pumping stations have been built in the communes in the outskirts of Hanoi to bring clean water to local residents-- in the context of the serious underground water pollution.
16	Hanoi to implement major environment plan	11/8/2011	SGGP	Hanoi	Environment	Hanoi People's Committee is planning to implement an environment protection plan for the city until 2020 with further guidelines till 2030, at a cost of VND3.3 billion.



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17	Sewage disposal threatens city's water supply	11/8/2011	MONRE	HCM	Wastewater	HCM City has discovered that many enterprises discharge untreated sewage into Saigon River and contaminate the water supply of many households in the city.
18	Unlicensed company still allowed to treat hazardous wastes	11/8/2011	MONRE	HCM	Waste treatment	No headquarter, no factory, no practice license, but the Ha Lan Environment Service and Waste Treatment Company still could sign a lot of contracts with enterprises on waste treatment.
19	Lake beautification gets mixed reviews	12/8/2011	VN News	Hanoi	Environment	Twenty State enterprises and private companies have been engaging in a project organised by the Ha Noi Department of Construction to renovate lakes located in the capital city, but although some results have been achieved, not all residents are satisfied.
20	City hosts campaign to reduce climate change	12/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Climate Change	A global campaign to help control climate change and its effects started in Viet Nam yesterday.
21	Vietnam, Netherlands join forces on climate change	12/8/2011	MONRE	Hanoi	Others	Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai chaired a meeting of the Vietnam Subcommittee of the Vietnam-Netherlands Intergovernmental Committee on Thursday to fulfill duties under the bilateral strategic cooperation agreement on climate change adaptation and water management.
22	Medical waste treatment gets additional funding	13/8/2011	VN News	Vietnam	Waste	MONRE has agreed to provide 1% of its annual budget for environmental protection to MOH for upgrading liquid and solid waste treatment systems at public hospitals by 2015.
23	City needs \$673m for flood control, irrigation	15/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Environment	The HCM City People's Committee has asked the Government to allocate more funds to 16 flood-control and irrigation projects due for completion in 2015.



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24	Craft village turns into big polluter	15/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Pollution	Business activity in the famous craft village of Hoai Hao in the central province of Binh Dinh was quiet for years until most of the producers decided to purchase advanced machinery.
25	Sonadezi spewing excessive wastewater	17/8/2011	SGGP	Dong Nai	Wastewater	The Criminal Investigation Police under the Ministry of Public Security has disclosed that the Sonadezi Company in Long Thanh Industrial Zone of Dong Nai Province is spewing untreated wastewater into the Dong Nai River, far beyond permissible levels.
26	Delta faces high erosion threat	17/8/2011	VN News	MeKong Delta	Environment	Erosion of riverbanks in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta poses a serious threat this year, experts warn.
27	HCM City eyes energy from waste	18/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Waste	As HCM City residents and businesses dump huge volumes of waste every day, authorities are exploring ways to generate energy from waste.
28	New Green tax to fight pollution	18/8/2011	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Environment protection tax (EPT) will be imposed next year on products classified as hazardous to the environment.
29	Plan to move firms polluting Dong Nai	20/8/2011	VN News	Dong Nai	Environment	The ageing Bien Hoa 1 Industrial Zone in the southern province of Dong Nai will be converted into an urban trade-and-services area to help stop continued pollution of Dong Nai River with factory waste.
30	Better pollution rules urged	22/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Environment	Experts have called for professionalizing environmental management, protection and scrapping contradictory environmental regulations.
31	Garment maker discharges waste	22/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Wastewater	A big textile and garment corporation in HCM City was caught last week discharging its untreated wastewater directly to the Tham Luong Canal.



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32	Waste treatment causes pollution	23/8/2011	VN News	Danang	Pollution	Waste water treatment stations in central Da Nang City that were set up to reduce pollution in the city are themselves causing environmental pollution.
33	Flooded streets slow life in HCMC	24/8/2011	SGGP	HCM	Environment	Two hours of intense heavy rainfall in Ho Chi Minh City yesterday afternoon resulted in submerged streets, traffic gridlock and stranded motorcyclists.
34	US investor to build \$700m waste treatment complex near HCM City	24/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Waste treatment	Local authorities yesterday discussed with an American investor about a US\$700 million waste treatment project to be built in Long An Province, some 30km west of HCM City.
35	Hospitals told to treat medical waste	25/8/2011	VN News	HCM	Waste treatment	All hospitals in HCM City have to install medical wastewater treatment facilities meeting national standards by the end of this year or face the prospect of being shut down.
36	Titanium mining suspended over environment fears	26/8/2011	VN News	Binh Thuan	Environment	The Government has ordered a halt in licensing titanium ore exploration and exploitation in south central Binh Thuan Province, with a view to ensure local environmental preservation.
37	Can Tho drowns in medical waste	30/8/2011	VN News	CanTho	Waste	The treatment & disposal of medical waste has become a serious problem in the southern CanTho.
38	Mekong floodwaters rise rapidly	30/8/2011	VN News	MeKong Delta	Environment	Floodwaters from the upper stream of the Tien and Hau rivers, the main tributaries of the Mekong River, are threatening thousands of ha of the autumn-winter rice crop.
39	Landslide fatalities prompt safety moves	30/8/2011	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Six people including two 11-year-olds died in cave-ins and a landslide in the last two days in the northern mountainous provinces of Lao Cai and Yen Bai and in HCM City.



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Poverty grows in mining areas

Mining is tending to exacerbate poverty rather than alleviate it, according to the results of an 18-month study on the impacts of mining in the provinces of Hoa Binh, Phu Tho, Lao Cai, Lam Dong and Dak Lak Province conducted by the Centre for People and Nature Reconciliation in July 2009.

The study surveyed about half of the households in these provinces in localities with significant mining operations.

Negative impacts on the lives of local residents were revealed in all of the areas studied, said the author of the centre's report, Tran Thi Thanh Thuy. "The poor seem to benefit nothing from mining operations," she said.

For instance, in Phon and Lung Thung Villages in Tan Pheo Commune in the northern province of Hoa Binh's Da Bac District, where an iron mine has been in operation since 2007, over 40 of the 118 households in the two villages were stripped of their homes and agricultural land to make way for mining operations, with residents falling into unemployment and poverty.

Land clearance compensation received by households in these areas was very low, ranging from VND1,000 to VND11,000 per square metre of land, according to the report.

The mining operations themselves also failed to provide jobs to the local poor due to their lack of knowledge and job skills. Only five local residents in these villages were offered jobs, and these were temporary positions as security guards or cooks at the mine.

Mining contributes about 10 per cent to gross domestic product (GDP), according to the General Statistics Office, but generates only about 1 per cent of the country's total contract employment.

The report by the Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) also noted that fewer than 50 per cent of mine workers held more than temporary or seasonal employment with an uncertain income. In addition, mining operations destroyed water and soil resources in these areas.

Duong Thi Thuy, an official from the People's Committee of Tan Pheo Commune, said that the iron mine had worsened the quality of life for local residents, increasing the proportion of households living in poverty by 11 per cent since 2007.

Similar impacts could be seen in the other four localities surveyed, Thuy said, including Son Thuy (Phu Tho), Ea Sar (Dak Lak), Coc My (Lao Cai) and Loc Phat (Lam Dong), including pollution and degradation of bridges and roads caused by irresponsible mine operators.

The director of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment's Department of Mining Management, Lai Hong Thanh, said that small-scale mining enterprises often ignored their responsibilities because they wanted to maximise profits.

A study by Scott Pegg from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) also concluded that the impacts of mining could increase the vulnerabilities of the poor while exposing them to a variety of social risks, including unemployment, inflation and social tensions.

"It is important now to take steps to ensure the compatibility between mining and poverty reduction," Thuy said.

According to Thanh, Viet Nam's new Mineral Law , which took effect on July 1, 2011, would help ensure mining enterprises take responsibility for protecting the environment and contributing to local development.

Under the law, mining licence fees could generate VND5-7 trillion (US\$240-340 million), he said, as well as require mining enterprises to contribute to local infrastructure and employment of local workers. Regulations on payment of compensation were also included in the law, Thanh said.

Rigorous enforcement of the new law was necessary to reduce the negative impacts of mining on the poor while increasing the contributions of the mining industry to poverty reduction, he added.

Viet Nam has about 500 mines exploiting 600 different types of minerals throughout the country. During 2006-09, the nation became a global leader in exporting such minerals as coal, tin and barium.

Polluter uses legal loophole to delay paying heavy fine

Industrial firms found committing grave violations in disposing of their toxic solid waste are exploiting a legal loophole to avoid or defer paying fines, the Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper reports.

The Binh Chanh Construction Investment JSC (BCCI) has delayed paying fines imposed on it for more than two years now.

According to a Government decree (No. 174/2007/ND-CP dated Nov. 29, 2007) any organisation or individual generating and discharging harmful solid waste while manufacturing or trading has to pay environmental protection charges.

The People's Councils in provinces and cities would decide the fine based on a framework rate set by the government.

HCM City has so far promulgated environmental protection charges for solid waste generated by families, but not for harmful solid waste, and this has allowed enterprises to keep delaying payment and raise various objections.

More than two years ago, on April 17, 2009, the staff of the Wastewater treatment plant of the Le Minh Xuan Industrial Park under BCCI were caught red-handed dumping waste slush on unoccupied parts of the park by the Environmental Crime Prevention Department (C49B).

The department report said the plant had discharged more than 1,500 tonnes of slush since the decree took effect.

However, BCCI protested that the estimate was too high.

C49B agreed to let the company weigh and measure the slush by itself, and the two sides settled on 856 tonnes.

Test results on the samples taken at three different times showed the mud to be toxic.

C49B decided to penalise BCCI VND38 million for administrative violations and collect VND2.5 billion in environmental protection charges.

BCCI paid the administrative fine and asked that the other charge be reduced to VND677 million, but it was refused.

In June, BCCI sent an official document to C49B saying it would pay the charge, but asked that the date be extended to the end of the year because of the harsh economic conditions.

In August, the firm sent another official document asking C49B to reconsider the amount of slush it had dumped, and also proposed that the money be used to improve the industrial park's environment instead of the city budget.

C49B refused.

The company then sent yet another document saying there was no basis for the charge because the city had not announced the rate at which the discharge of harmful solid waste is fined.

However, the Viet Nam National Environment Administration then affirmed that C49B's move to collect the environment protection charge from BCCI was in accordance with current regulations.

C49B has since asked the city People's Committee to take measures and collect the dues.

"The city has not promulgated rates because organisations and individuals that produce harmful solid waste have to sign contracts with waste-treatment companies under the city's regulations.

The city now does not know which rate it should apply in BCCI's case," a representative of the city department of natural resources and environment, said at a meeting held on July 29 between C49B and relevant departments to discuss measures to collect payment from the company.

A representative of Justice Department said the city authorities had been simplistic in their approach to the problem, assuming no toxic waste would be dumped if the law mandated that contracts are signed with a waste treatment company.

In fact, many organisations and individuals signed such contracts only as a necessary formality, he said.

Colonel Duong Van Linh, deputy head of C49B, said: "The environmental protection charges for solid waste disposal cannot exceed VND6 million per tonnes under the decree. C49B decided to apply an average rate of VND3 million in BCCI's case.

"However, the decision on how much to charge finally belongs to the city."

It was decided at the meeting that the municipal administration will petition People's Council to promulgate environmental protection rates for disposal of toxic solid waste and also issue a specific decision for the BCCI case.

Flooded streets block traffic in capital city

Heavy rains flooded dozens of streets in Ha Noi early yesterday afternoon, making them impassable, and water overflowed from some of the lakes in the city.

In the worst-flooded streets, including Nguyen Khuyen, Le Trong Tan, Giai Phong, Truong Chinh, Thai Ha, Kim Lien, Nguyen Duc Canh, Pham Hung and Ngoc Khanh, traffic was halted for more than an hour. Vehicles stalled while trying to run through deep water.

"I regret trying to pass this street. The water is so deep," said a man whose motorbike stopped on Thai Think Street.

The Ha Noi Water Drainage Company said the capital's drainage system had failed to handle such a huge amount of water in a short period of time (about half an hour) despite efforts to improve the situation earlier this year.

A company officer said they had not expected so many streets to flood.

The city Department of Agriculture and Rural Development said water had started to spill over some major lakes in Ha Noi, such as Dong Suong and Van Son in Chuong My District.

Other reservoirs had also become full after four consecutive days of rain caused by tropical Storm Nock-Ten.

The department also reported that water level in some major rivers in the city – Nhue, Tich and Day – was already high.

Deputy Chairman of the Ha Noi People's Committee Tran Xuan Viet asked that prior notice be given to low-lying areas if reservoirs were to be discharged.

Meanwhile, prolonged rain and whirlwinds that started on Saturday destroyed some 80 houses in the southern province of Long An and resulted in a serious landslide, damaging four shrimp farms, causing losses of billions of dong in Bac Lieu Province.

Khanh Hoa Province: Clean water comes to more rural areas

Many people in rural areas of Khanh Hoa Province previously have only well water to use. Since Khanh Hoa Center for Rural Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation put some water supply stations into operation, prospects of clean water use in the rural areas have been opened.

Conveniences for rural residents

Dien Phuoc – Dien Lac – Dien Tho Water Supply, operating during the past several months, has heartened households in Dien Khanh District.

Nguyen Xuan Luan, a resident in Phuoc Luong, Dien Tho said that tap water really brought his family convenience because well water, which he had used before, sometimes went polluted or dry, not enough for his family's use while tap water was always clean, even in the rainy season. Many other households also want to replace well water by tap water. At present, tap water price is reasonable, VND3,300/m³.

Actually, clean water supplied by the provincial Center for Rural Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation makes users feel safe because the water always is deposited, filtered and decontaminated to meet clean water standards. It brings rural people a chance to use clean water like in urban areas, contributing urbanization process of the province.

Many new water supply projects

The provincial Center for Rural Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation has put two water supply systems into operation, namely Dien Phuoc – Dien Lac – Dien Tho in Dien Khanh District and Ninh Xuan in Ninh Hoa District, according to Le Van Hung, director of the center.

Dien Phuoc – Dien Lac – Dien Tho water supply system invested VND1.45 billion can supply clean water for 4,500 households with a capacity of 60 liters/person/day. The other invested VND8.7 billion can supply water for nearly 10,000 users.

Tap-water also helps rural residents access modern home appliances like washing machine or water heater, gradually improving their living standards, added Hung.

At present, the center is building up two other water supply systems in Ninh Hoa District, including Ninh Binh – Ninh Quang – Ninh Hung (investment capital: VND26 billion and capacity:

2,008m³/day) and Ninh Trung – Ninh Than – Ninh Dong (investment capital: VND22 billion and capacity: 1,800m³/day). These works is scheduled to start operation in end 2011.

In 2012, the center plans to build a water supply station in Cam Lam District to supply clean water for three communes, namely Cam Hiep Bac, Cam Hiep Nam and Cam An Nam.

Khanh Hoa is striving to become a city directly under the central government in 2015, which requires 95% in rate of clean water using households. As a result, water supply projects surely will be made to improve living standards and hasten urbanization.

Puny fines fail to deter environmental crimes

Viet Nam should immediately look for ways to avoid becoming an industrial garbage dump, a senior official said on Monday.

Nguyen Xuan Ly, head of the Ministry of Public Security's Environmental Crime Prevention Department, also told a seminar held in HCM City that environmental crimes and violations in the management of hazardous waste had increased nationwide in "complicated" ways.

The main reason was that legal punishments were not strong enough to deter such actions, he said.

The seminar discussed ways to prevent and fight environmental crimes and violations relating to hazardous waste management.

Ly said just 60 per cent of hazardous waste generated in the country was treated and the remaining amount was illegally buried, dumped into the environment or recycled for use.

In 2010, Viet Nam discharged about 32 million tones of solid waste, including 1 million tones of hazardous waste.

Hazardous waste is generated mostly in industrial factories, handicraft villages and medical establishments.

While the violations are widespread, inspections and punishment cover only about 10 per cent of actual number of cases, according to the Environmental Crime Prevention Department.

Last year, a total of 322 cases of hazardous waste management violations were discovered and fined a total of VND10billion (US\$476,000).

Of these, 29 per cent were violations of regulations on discharge of hazardous waste, 33 per cent on collecting and transporting it, 25 per cent on destroying and dumping it into the environment and 13 per cent on recycling it for reuse.

Under current regulations, the highest fine for violations in managing hazardous waste was just VND500 million (\$23,000), while the actions of violating companies fetched them benefits of several billion dong.

Seminar participants said another pressing issue was the widespread violations on importing hazardous waste, including old electronic equipment and old batteries, under the guise of importing raw material for production and temporary import for re-export.

The import of old batteries for taking lead, a process that releases other hazardous substances like acid and mercury into the environment without proper treatment, was having serious environmental impacts, they said.

Ly then commented that Viet Nam was becoming an industrial dump for developed countries.

Hoang Van Vy, deputy head of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment's Inspectorate, said in some localities the capacity of managing hazardous waste was still weak and corruption was prevalent.

To manage hazardous waste effectively, the Government needed to complete detailed legal regulations soon, Vy said. He said inspections of violations must be strengthened and punishments made to fit the crime.

Large irrigation project comes to a standstill

An irrigation project worth VND300 billion (USD14.55 million) in Thua Thien Hue Province has been postponed because of environmental threats.

The project, Tay Nam Huong Tra, is one the biggest of its kind in the central province of Thua Thien Hue. However it has been riddled with problems such as sluggish construction, along with technical errors and a bad safety record for a long time.

Several shortcomings

The project is aimed to ensure irrigation for nearly 300 hectares of agricultural land in seven communes in the southwest of Huong Tra District. The project includes the Khe Ngang water reservoir and several irrigation systems which would link different communes.

Even though some parts of the project have been constructed, they are being downgraded because the investors did not comply with standard construction commitments. One newly-built canal section, running through Huong An Commune, suffered from erosion.

Ha Van Truong, a local man from Huong Chu Commune's Phu O Hamlet, shared, "My hometown floods each year. From what I can see, this new canal will probably not do much to stop the floods."

Several cracks and sinkholes have been discovered in Khe Ngang Reservoir, which is the centerpiece of the entire project. Construction of the reservoir had to stop while these problems were looked into.

According to local residents, the investor has yet to pay promised compensation, which is among the major reasons for the project's stagnation.

In the end of June 2011, the provincial government urged the investor and contractors to speed up work on the project in order to prevent possible squandering.

Stagnation not a result of lack of capital

Vo Quang Vinh, an official of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and head of the project's management board, admitted, "The tardiness of compensation payments is due to the lack of personnel. There are only three people who are in charge compensation, so they have not been able to complete the work on time."

In the meantime, Tran Hung Long, Head of Huong Tra District's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development attributed the stagnation to the lack of cooperation between project officials and local authorities. The project's technical dossier was just recently sent to local authorities.

Because of the slow pace, the local authorities were compelled to allocate land for construction before compensation to residents was completed, he said.

He added that compensation should be complete by December this year. Who should be held responsible? According to Vinh, the project strictly complied with all the technical requirements of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), who financed more than VND200 billion (USD9.7 million) of the construction.

His explained that the recorded incidents were due to weather conditions unfavorable to construction. Also, he says, a subcontractor is to blame for having used bamboo poles that were too short for the dam's foundation.

Concerning the cracks and sinkholes in the reservoir, he said, "This is a normal phenomenon during the construction of a reservoir. Consultancy agencies and inspectors have been working to find out the exact causes. We will come into the final conclusion about this issue in the next month."

Poor management puzzled by heavy dangerous waste

Increasing amount of dangerous waste due to fast industrialization has put a big pressure on environment protection efforts, officials said at a conference Monday.

Statistics from the Department of Environment Criminals from the Ministry of Public Security showed that the country last year discharged around 32 million tons of solid waste, including around 200,000 medical wastes, 11 million tons from agricultural areas, 13 million tons from urban residential areas and six million tons of industrial waste. Many of them are ranked as dangerous waste, said the department head Nguyen Xuan Ly.

Ly said that only around 60 percent of dangerous waste has been treated according to environmental requirements. The rest has been either buried, discharged everywhere or recycled illegally. His deputy revealed at the conference that the authorities last year punished 322 violations concerning dangerous waste, for a total of nearly VND10 billion (US\$485,790).

Among the violators were Song Xanh Company in the southern beach town Vung Tau which had illegally buried more than 4,600 cubic meters of dangerous waste, Binh Chanh Construction Invested JSC in Ho Chi Minh City which illegally discharged 836 tons of waste mud, and Phu Gia Company in the northern province of Hoa Binh which illegally recycled 59,000 liters of waste oil.

Officials at the conference said that the country is discharging too much dangerous waste for poorly-supervised treatment facilities and confusing regulations to handle.

Nguyen Van Phuoc, deputy director of HCMC Department of Natural Resources and Environment, said that the city has the largest number of industrial facilities in Vietnam, which is between 10,000 and 20,000.

Annual surveys showed that the city discharged around 350 to 500 tons of dangerous waste from industrial operation every year, and 9 to 12 tons of dangerous medical waste.

The amount of dangerous waste around HCMC is estimated to increase 10 to 12 percent every year and reach around 400,000 tons in 2015, Phuoc said.

He said the city is still giving permits to treatment plants operating outside industrial zones, which makes them hard to control.

Also, the city is yet to build a modern garbage dump that is large enough for safe burial of dangerous waste.

Tran Van Khuong, an official from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, said at the conference that regulations on environment pollution punishment are unclear.

The regulations require individuals and organizations to report their discharge of dangerous waste to the authorized agencies but do not specify the amount of waste that needs the reporting, Khuong said. He said the government's rules also failed to set specific technical requirements on vehicles for transporting dangerous waste. Hoang Van Vy, a senior inspector from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, said that environment officials at some places have even been corrupted and allowed unqualified groups and people to perform the waste treatment job.

In order to fix the situation, Vy suggested that concerned agencies to perfect regulations, simplify administrative procedures involved, enhance inspections and raise the penalties. The entryway of the industrial zone Tan Thuan in HCMC's District 7. Industrial waste is a kind of dangerous waste that has puzzled environmental authorities.

Finland pledges aid for climate change

The Finnish Embassy in Ha Noi has earmarked 160,600 euros (US\$230,000) to help non-governmental organisations based in the south tackle climate-change challenges in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta region.

It signed an agreement in HCM City yesterday with the Centre for Cooperation Human Resource Development (C&D), a Vietnamese NGO, which has drawn up a two-year programme to strengthen southern NGOs.

The programme will enable them to support local communities in the provinces of Ben Tre and Tra Vinh to respond to climate change challenges and pursue inclusive and sustainable development initiatives.

"Building capacity for Vietnamese civil society organisations and assisting localities, including the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta which is identified as one of the regions most affected, in adapting to climate change are our focus," Pekka Hyvunen, the Finnish ambassador, said. He identified the two provinces as the most vulnerable to climate change.

The project would not only provide southern NGOs opportunities to strengthen their institutional capacity and participate in a network that raises common voices, but also enable them to work with communities vulnerable to climate change, he added.

Phan Van Ngoc, executive director of the Centre for Community Capacity Building on Environmental Protection, said: "Roles of local government agencies and civil society organisations are essential as they are most directly aware of and involved in day-to-day issues at the local level.

"We should strengthen civil society organisations as there is very little pro-active engagement of civil society organisations in climate change adaptation in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta."

New cemetery a threat to water for 10 million

A project to build a 200ha cemetery close to the Dong Nai River poses a threat to the resource that supplies clean water for over 10 million people in HCM City and Dong Nai Province, experts say.

According to the Dong Nai Farming Service Coop (Dona Coop), developer of the Vinh Hang (Eternity) Cemetery, the new, private facility has the capacity to be the last resting place for 100,000 people.

Dona Coop will invest some VND500 billion (US\$24.2 million) in the first stage of the project, which is expected to become operational by the end of 2011.

The area under the project will be expanded from 116ha in the first stage to over 200ha in the second.

The cemetery project was introduced as the best and most modern cemetery in Viet Nam by Dona Coop early last month.

However, it is located only 100m from the Dong Nai River in eponymous province's Vinh Cuu District.

Dr Nguyen Minh Hoa, head of Urbanization Studies at the HCM City University of Social and Human Sciences, said burying 100,000 dead bodies in an area close to the upper section of the Dong Nai River would cause "very big problems."

"It [the cemetery] will seriously affect the quality of the water resource used by millions of residents in the Southern Focal Economic Zone, especially the population of HCM City," Hoa was quoted as saying by Lao Dong (Labour) newspaper.

In addition to the Thien Tan Water Plant which supplies clean water to residents of Dong Nai Province, the river feeds the Binh An BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) Water Plant, the Thu Duc Water Plant and the Thu Duc BOO (Build-Own-Operate) Water Plant in the lower section of the river. These three plants supply some 1.2 million cubic meters of clean water per day to 10 million residents in HCM City.

In its environment impact assessment report for the cemetery project, Dona Coop said that before burying, the concrete structure of each tomb would be built with water-proof materials covering its bottom, aiming to minimize the impact they would have on the environment.

Tran Quoc Buu, an expert on environment and water resources, said the risk of the cemetery polluting the Dong Nai River could not be ignored.

"It would be better to re-locate the cemetery in another place far away from the river to ensure safety of the water resource as well as the health of millions who rely on water from the Dong Nai River for their daily use," said Buu.

Pollution problems worsen in capital

Environmentalists reported that pollution has recently worsened in Ha Noi, caused by solid and water waste as well as exhausts fumes.

Contamination has seriously affected local residents' health and daily lives, they said.

Fourteen hospitals in the western part of the city had their waste treatment systems downgraded, and eight central hospitals temporarily treated waste with Cloramin B when their systems failed.

Fewer than 200 of the city's 3,000 enterprises discharging industrial waste have proper treatment systems, and many only use them in the presence of the police and inspectors.

In the past two years, the city authorities have expanded programme to collect solid waste, burying up to 70 per cent of daily waste and treating water in local lakes. But their efforts have had a limited effect.

One of the main causes of pollution is a simple lack of awareness on the part of local residents, said deputy director of the municipal Department of Natural Resources and Environment Pham Van Khanh.

"Most people think that treating environmental pollution is the Government's work. If they continue to rely on the State like that, the problem cannot be solved," he said.

Over the past two years, the enterprises causing pollution have developed faster than waste treatment schemes, making it difficult to address the issue.

Khanh also blamed light punishments for the enterprises' continuing resistance to environmental reform.

"Businesses would rather just pay the fines than set up a system, since the latter is doubly expensive," he said.

Depending on the level of pollution, an enterprise can be fined up to VND70 million (US\$3,400).

City authorities have called for investment from enterprises to carry out the project of collecting and treating daily waste, said Khanh.

The city, in conjunction with the Advanced International Joint-stock Company, is considering building a waste treatment factory in Soc Son District.

Ha Noi has also begun a pilot project to burn solid waste in My Duc District.

"We assigned at least two environmental officials to each district," he said.

The city discharges about 1,250 tonnes of rubbish a day, 100 tonnes of which come from industrial zones and hospitals, according to statistics of the Ha Noi Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

Ha Noi to get building-waste dumps

The Ha Noi People's Committee yesterday approved VND54 billion (US\$2.6 million) towards building four construction waste dumps covering a total area of over 21ha.

The dumps, planned for the outlying districts of Me Linh, Dong Anh, Thanh Tri and Gia Lam, will be built in efforts aimed at curbing the illegal disposal of waste and subsequent pollution.

The city's Construction Department will take charge of the project until complete.

Untreated waste water found pouring into river

A major wastewater treatment plant located in an industrial park in southern Dong Nai Province has been found discharging untreated waste water into the Dong Nai River via an underground pipeline system.

The Environmental Police Department (C49) said the Sonadezi company on Thursday discharged 9,300 cubic metres of untreated wastewater into the river via three underground pipelines.

In the early morning hours, the C49 team observed the plant's wastewater treatment system centre and discovered that the system was out of order and the untreated wastewater was being discharged into the river.

Senior Lieutenant Colonel Cu Nam Tien, deputy manager II of C49, said Sonadezi was responsible for treating wastewater for 42 companies in Long Thanh Industrial Park.

The water from the companies is first stored in a reservoir with a volume of 35,000 cubic metres.

Police said the company's reservoir was connected to three underground pipelines, each was 600 metres long and 30 centimetres in diameter, and about two to three metres underground.

The untreated wastewater flowed from the reservoir through the pipelines to the Ba Cheo Canal and then into the Dong Nai River.

According to C49, during the last five years, Sonadezi has discharged 14 million cu.m of untreated wastewater into the Dong Nai River, causing serious water pollution.

On the day of the C49 inspection, the managers and representatives of Sonadezi signed a document in which they acknowledged that they were violating the law, the police investigative unit said.

C49 is continuing its investigation into the case.

In another major water-pollution case, Vedan Viet Nam in 2008 was caught and later heavily fined for discharging untreated wastewater into Thi Vai River in southern Dong Nai province, causing serious pollution and financial losses to thousands of fishing households in Dong Nai and Ba Ria – Vung Tau provinces and HCM City.

Many fishermen and farmers received compensation from Vedan after filing lawsuits against the company. The case was finally settled in the courts.

Dam projects require stricter assessments

Experts have called for more stringent environmental and socio-economic assessment on the impact of hydro-electric dams built along and across the Dong Nai River.

Dams, especially those built around the river's upper end, have worried experts and local residents alike due to their negative impact on the river, its basin, the environment and biodiversity.

Speaking at a workshop held in Dong Nai Province yesterday, Dr Vu Ngoc Long, from the Viet Nam River Network's southern office, said that ensuring the natural flow and balance of water volume in the upper regions of the river would be crucial to the development of the entire river basin.

"The lower part of Dong Nai River, key to food plants and industrial trees in both Dong Nai and Lam Dong provinces, is extremely vulnerable," he said.

Among the dams listed in the national power development strategy, power plant projects 6 and 6A will reclaim around 327ha of forest land in the Cat Tien National Park and its buffer zone.

Such projects have created increased concern related to impacts on biodiversity and the environment, according to experts, seeing as reservoirs will take up vast amounts of forestland in Dong Nai, Lam Dong and Binh Phuoc provinces.

However, the Duc Long Gia Lai Corporation has said that its projects would not negatively influence the volume of water or the park.

Nguyen Van Sy, chief consultant for Duc Long Gia Lai, said: "Reservoirs 6 and 6A will operate on a daily basis, allowing the retention and release of water within one day to minimize impacts on natural flow".

He added that the project would not occupy agricultural and residential land while not interfering with national park wild life.

Experts have noted that environmental impact assessments have not been entirely reliable.

"Environmental impact assessment (EIA) conducted by the investor itself have proven insufficient. They do not include information based on biodiversity changes, reservoir bed deposits, the management and protection of forests, changes to wild animal habitats, changes in water volume and erosion," said Le Anh Tuan, from the Can Tho University.

"The investor has failed to take into account potential risks and mistakes related to construction and operation," he noted.

Pham Thi Cam Nhung, from the WWF, said: "Noise from transporting construction materials, construction itself, mining and waste will create stress and reduce health among animals while opening a corridor for illegal logging and hunting."

According to Dr Dao Trong Tu, a senior consultant at the Viet Nam River Network, river water resources and forestland were national property related to public benefits necessitating thorough thought before action.

Tuan suggested not carrying out the projects due to the considerable risk and impact they pose.

Hydro plants to face environmental checks

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment said yesterday it would check on whether small and medium hydro-electric plants in 15 northern mountainous provinces complied with environmental regulations.

The ministry has also sent inspection teams to seven provinces and cities to examine if urban area projects comply with land regulations. They are also inspecting mining activities in four central provinces run by the Titan Company.

The ministry will also work with the People's Committee in several localities including Ha Noi and HCM City to try and sort out complicated issues.

This follows 3,300 complaints to the ministry of which 97.3 per cent related to land management.

Hundreds of billions of dong spent, but people don't have clean water

Tens of clean water pumping stations have been built in the communes in the outskirts of Hanoi to bring clean water to local residents-- in the context of the serious underground water pollution. However, the stations have never been used and they are awaiting liquidation.

Dying for over 10 years

In 1990s, the Hanoi's authorities decided to spend hundreds of billions of dong to build tens of clean water supply stations in the areas, where underground water got seriously polluted in the process of rural area urbanization. However, according to the Hanoi Department for Agriculture and Rural Development, 16 stations have never been put into operation or have been downgrading.

Nang luong moi's reporters came to the Phu Dong clean water station in Phu Dong commune in Gia Lam, one of the 16 stations which have been left idle. It was in the morning of a working day, but no worker was seen at the station covering an area of hundreds of square meters.

A local resident told the reporters that they should look for the security guard because only the officer can open the door of the locked station. "There is nothing for you to see at the station. It has stopped operation for the last eight years," said the security guard, named Xuyen.

All the things the reporters could see on the campus of the station were tractors and other agricultural equipments. A building which was designed as the operation center of the station has turned into the storehouse, where there were oil drums or construction materials. Especially, the water supply unit has been used as the altar.

One could see in the area around the pumping station the pipelines, water filtration, which has become stained and rusty over the last 10 years. These were all the things which have been left at the construction work worth 4.5 billion dong.

According to Xuan, the clean water station was handed over to the commune's authorities in 2001. In the first phase of operation, the station provided clean water to 100 out of 3000 households here. However, as the money collected from the households using clean water was too small, which was not big enough to keep the operation of the station, it has been left idle since then.

Xuan said that the money local residents had to pay for the clean water was higher than their income. Therefore, they would rather use the polluted underground water than paying for clean water.

When the reporters expressed their willing to have a meeting with the leaders of the Phu Dong commune's authorities, Hoang Duc Cuong, Chair of the Phu Dong Commune, said that the reporters should have made an appointment before, while he could not receive the reporters because he had to leave. Some minutes later, the reporters were asked to go out of the commune's people's committee office, because the working hours finished. It was 10.30 am.

Waiting 10 years for liquidation

After 10 years of being exposed to the sun and rain, and existing without any maintenance, most of the clean water pumping works have been seriously damaged. Meanwhile, as the underground water has been seriously polluted, local residents have to buy clean water from neighboring areas.

Similarly, in Xuan Non Commune in Dong Anh province, a clean water station, which was built in 2001 with the cost of one billion dong, has been left idle.

Nang luong moi's reporters had to wait two hours outside the station but they still could not meet any one, who could lead them to the inside area of the station. All the operation systems, valves, meters, backbone pipelines and tanks have been absolutely damaged which cannot be used any more.

Kim Tien hamlet has been found as the place, where the toxin percentages have far exceeded the allowed levels. Local residents well know the information, but they have no other choice than using the polluted underground water.

According to Nguyen Doan Luong, Deputy Chair of Xuan Non Commune's People's Committee said that local residents refused to use the water from the station, because they do not have money to pay. Therefore, the local authorities have decided to liquidate the station.

Hanoi to implement major environment plan

Hanoi People's Committee is planning to implement an environment protection plan for the city until 2020 with further guidelines till 2030, at a cost of VND3.3 billion (US\$161,000).

The project plan will be complete and set to roll within the next 2 years and will lay the foundation for minimizing depletion of natural resources, controlling environmental pollution and improving environmental management in the city.

Hanoi Department of Natural Resources and Environment, being the chief protagonists, have been requested to analyze and take stock of the various projects across Hanoi such as the greater Hanoi expansion plan, the national strategy for environment protection, the plan for resource and environment monitoring, the national strategy for water resources and the general plan for economic and social development in Hanoi.

The department must also choose suitable contractors to set up projects like waste water treatment plants, recycling of solid waste, planning the drainage systems, water supply management, protecting the city air from dust, exhaust fumes and toxic pollutants, land and soil protection and the management of burial sites, amusement parks and the city's green cover.

Sewage disposal threatens city's water supply

Ho Chi Minh City has discovered that many enterprises discharge untreated sewage into Saigon River and contaminate the water supply of many households in the city.

The Saigon Water Corporation or Sawaco, the main water supplier to the city's households and companies, has continually informed the government about this happening matter.

The HCMC Department of Natural Resources and Environment looked into the alarming issue and brought lots of law-breaking companies into light.

Many were caught red-handed not have the sewage treatment systems while the others equipped with these systems failed to remove the contaminants.

Some enterprises, namely Pham Thu Company, White Palace Convention Center and Tan Vinh Phat Company, have been penalized for their untreated sewage disposal earlier, but they have continued to make the same mistakes again.

The reason for this law disobedience is from the insufficient methods to deal with this problem, say local authorities.

The existing investigations focus solely on some certain enterprises although there are lots of inspection teams. The penalties are handed down but local authorities' coercions are not thoroughly carried out.

The statistics show that these companies dispose to the surrounding environment roughly 100-1,000 cubic meters of harmful sewage per day.

This untreated sewage contains organic compounds and heavy metals which is brought through the canals to Saigon River and pollutes the water supply of the city.

The quality of water in Saigon River is very poor and unfit for providing to the citizens as the pollution rate in this water supply is now rapidly shooting up, say environment experts.

Sawaco said that the company will think of moving the water treatment plant out of the polluted area or improving their current plant with more advanced technology. This considerable change will unexpectedly push up the cost of supplied water.

Nguyen Van Phuoc, the Deputy Director of the city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment, stated that the upcoming investigations and penalties on the harmful sewage disposal will be undertaken more thoroughly and seriously.

The department's officials and local authorities are talking over the issue and trying to find out the most suitable coercions for the law-breaking enterprises. They hope this plan will help solve the existing problems soon.

Unlicensed company still allowed to treat hazardous wastes

No headquarter; no factory, no practice license, but the Ha Lan Environment Service and Waste Treatment Company still could sign a lot of contracts with enterprises on waste treatment.

In late 2010, the HCM City Department of Natural Resources and the Environment released a decision on revoking the practice license on treating and disposing hazardous wastes from the Ha Lan Environment Service and Waste Treatment Company, while requesting the company to give the license to back to the department.

After that, Ha Lan many times asked for the permission from the department to use in the trial basis the incinerator CTNH RI- 203-150. In January 2011, the city's department released a document, agreeing the company to test the incinerator. However, in April 2011, after considering the results of the two tests, the department released a document, instructing Ha Lan Company to stop the trial burning.

Still operating despite revoked license

With no practice license and the unlicensed incinerator, Ha Lan still has been offering services and has signed a lot of contracts on hazardous waste treatment.

In March 2011, for example, Ha Lan signed a contract on treating the consignments of expired drugs owned by Trung Nam Pharmacy Company in Binh Thanh district in HCM City. The treatment cost was fixed at 10 million per consignment of less than 500 kilos.

The contract clearly stipulated that Ha Lan Company has to collect and carry the consignments to the places accepted by the HCM City Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, for treatment in accordance with the solution approved by the department.

However, the "solution approved by the department" was only submitted to the department one month later by the Trung Nam Company.

In May 2011, Deputy Director of the HCM City Department for Natural Resources and the Environment Nguyen Van Phuoc replied that the department accepted the suggested solution to combust the drugs, while combustion ashes must be solidified and stored safely, and the treatment process must have the witness of representatives from the department for natural resources and the environment, and the city's healthcare department.

Following the instructions by the watchdog agency, on May 19, 2011, Trung Nam Company sent a document, inviting representatives from the HCM City Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, to supervise the combustion, and witness the hand-over of the expired drugs from the Trung Nam's store to Ha Lan's store.

The enterprise with "three no's"

Prior to that, Ha Lan once got the license from the watchdog agency to carry and treat hazardous waste. However, a lot of problems have been found in the licensing procedures, since many formalities were skipped.

While the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment still had not expressed its official assessments about the environment impact report by Ha Lan Company, the HCM City Department of Natural Resources and the Environment on August 18, 2010, hurriedly granted practice license to treat and ruin hazardous waste to Ha Lan already.

Explaining the decision, the department said that this was necessary for the treatment of hazardous wastes in the city. It also could help apply new models in waste treatment. The list of Ha Lan's equipments allowed to be operational includes RI – 203 incinerators.

In fact, Ha Lan only has one "moving waste treatment station" as called by the HCM City Department for Natural Resources and the Environment. Ha Lan does not have stable ground for waste treatment, but it still has got the "favor" to treat a lot of kinds of hazardous wastes, except the compounds with chlorine.

Major General Nguyen Xuan Ly, Head of the Police Agency for Fighting Environment Crimes, said he could not understand why such a company which does not have treatment grounds still got a license.

Lake beautification gets mixed reviews

Twenty State enterprises and private companies have been engaging in a project organised by the Ha Noi Department of Construction to renovate lakes located in the capital city, but although some results have been achieved, not all residents are satisfied.

According to Doan Thanh Long, deputy director of the Ha Noi Construction Department, the project was aimed at achieving four objectives: putting an end to pollution by removing dirt and waste, improving the landscape thereby creating more green space, preventing people's encroachment on lakesides and preventing floods caused by rain in areas surrounding lakes.

Long said the project had so far received total funding of around VND300 billion (more than US\$14.5 million) from enterprises. Some companies such as Vincom JSC and Civil Engineering Construction Corporation No. 5 had contributed dozens of billions of dong.

The Ministry of Construction identified 20 lakes that were most in need of work, and out of these lakes, eight had been finished, seven were under renovation and plans were being made for the remaining five.

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the renovation project had helped improve the environment in areas surrounding lakes and prevented floods in the rainy season.

Long said that the project had achieved good results.

But while the authorities spoke quite highly of the results, the project does not seem to have satisfied everyone.

Nguyen Van Nguyen, a resident in Phuong Liet Ward in Thanh Xuan District who lives opposite Phuong Liet 2 Lake, said that he was not satisfied with the renovation, despite the fact the Department of Construction had announced that work had been completed.

Nguyen said that the work had helped beautify the landscape in the area with the construction of a new lakeside, installation of benches and planting of trees, but residents were still unhappy with the lake's unpleasant smell.

"The project only improved the situation by 50 per cent," he added.

Tran Thanh Hai, another resident living near the lake had the same opinion.

He said the water smelled even worse than before when fish were still living in the lake. Now there were no fish and the water had an unnatural green colour because of the use of chemicals.

Residents living near Vuc Lake in Long Bien District, another renovation project, also complained about the lake water, saying that it still had a disagreeable smell.

Nguyen Thu Hien, a resident living near the lake, said that the surroundings had improved but the water quality was still low.

According to the vice chairman of the Ecology Association, Mai Dinh Yen, the renovation of lakes had been well intended, but without scientific study that took into account ecological factors.

Yen said a natural lake should not just be a water container, it should also have living creatures and plants that sustain a clean lake through natural filtration and oxygenation.

He said the renovation project lacked the involvement of scientists and that was why the completed lakes failed to meet ecological standards.

"The project only works to solve immediate problems, but does not take into account sustainable development factors."

There have also been negative opinions raised by several newspapers about the slow renovation progress in some lakes, with some quoting residents' complaints about waiting too long.

Certain lakes were said to have been completed, but problems still remained regarding drainage and lakesides.

This fact was acknowledged by Long, citing land clearance and funding as the main difficulties.

One example is a project to construct a lakeside and plant trees around Ao ca bac Ho (Uncle Ho's fishpond) in central Hai Ba Trung District. The work has not started yet because 85 households will have to be relocated.

It seems that there is a long way to go until the project is properly completed, given all the problems and slow progress.

Long said the renovation of Ha Noi's central lakes could take a couple of years to complete, adding that "we might have to wait until 2020 to see all the capital's lakes clean and beautiful".

According to the Department of Construction, inner Ha Noi had a total of 111 lakes with a total area of 1,165ha.

Out of these, 46 had been cleaned and the previously stated 20 had been, or were going to be renovated. There have been no plans for the remainder.

City hosts campaign to reduce climate change

A global campaign to help control climate change and its effects started in Viet Nam yesterday.

One of its suggestions is that owners of homes and buildings paint them white to reflect the heat and save air conditioning.

"Campaign 350.org calls on all individuals and community groups to propose their own initiatives and plans to reduced carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from 392 parts per million to below 350," said campaign co-ordinator Hoang Thi Minh Hong.

With the theme Moving Planet, the campaign calls on people to use more bicycles, reduce the use of fossil energy and recycle waste.

A climate camp will be held in the Can Gio ecological area on the outskirts of HCM City to train people about climate change and help residential areas affected. Families and companies will be encouraged to paint their houses and office roofs white to reflect heat and reduce the need for air conditioning.

They will also be told that climbing plants can help reduce indoor temperatures and thus save energy.

A campaign will also be held to strengthen the awareness of students about building green lifestyles and encouraging recycling.

Thousands of Vietnamese will be mobilised to use bicycles or on global action day on September 24.

"I joined the campaign because it relates to myself and everyone around me," said Miss Grand Slam Asia 2009 and campaign Goodwill Ambassador Tran Thi Huong Giang.

"If we don't start acting today, it will be too late," she said.

Vietnam, Netherlands join forces on climate change

Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai chaired a meeting of the Vietnam Subcommittee of the Vietnam-Netherlands Intergovernmental Committee on Thursday to fulfill duties under the bilateral strategic cooperation agreement on climate change adaptation and water management.

The purpose of the establishment of the intergovernmental committee is to develop and fulfill the agreement signed by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and his Dutch counterpart Peter Balkenende in October 2010 which paved the way for the two countries to become strategic partners and give top priority to the field of climate change adaptation and water management.

Previously, Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai and Dutch Crown Prince Willem Alexander co-chaired the intergovernmental committee's first meeting in March at which the two sides discussed ways to step up cooperation in water management, climate change adaptation, and protection of relevant agricultural ecological system, especially implementation of the Mekong Delta plan, urban and rural planning and development, flooding control, water supply, wastewater treatment and building of related financial management institutions.

The committee discussed and defined such core tasks as the establishment of interdisciplinary coordination committees and working groups so as to accelerate the coordination with the Dutch side to set up the Mekong Delta plan, cooperation projects in climate change, control of water, land, and sea level rises as well.

At the meeting, the two sides agreed on the implementation of personnel organization and establishment of the committee, interdisciplinary coordination group, and standing office and working regulations to promptly inform and exchange information on steps of implementation with the Dutch side.

To carry out negotiations for a strategic partnership between the two governments, Hai underscored the requirements in defining and concretizing eight tasks assigned to the committee of which the core urgent task is to fulfill the Mekong Delta plan together with projects on studying and building development scenarios as well as institutions of relevant fields.

He also specified duties for members of the subcommittee to deploy working groups, take field trips to collect information, and prepare for workshops on the implementation of steps for cooperation and signed agreements.

Medical waste treatment gets additional funding

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has agreed to provide 1 per cent of its annual budget for environmental protection to the Ministry of Health for upgrading liquid and solid waste treatment systems at public hospitals by 2015.

This year the amount allocated for environmental protection was VND7.25 trillion (US\$352 million).

The health sector has estimated VND5 trillion (US\$243 million) would be needed for installing hospital waste-treatment systems by 2015, Tran Dac Phu, deputy head of the Health Environment Management Administration, said.

Many public hospitals have failed to install them due to a shortage of funds, he said, pointing out that even those with the systems frequently fail to treat waste because they lack the money to operate them.

Only 44 per cent of hospitals and clinics have treatment systems meeting environmental norms, he said.

Eighteen hospitals that cause severe environmental pollution need to be given priority in setting up treatment systems, he added.

The Ministry of Health has been tasked with drafting a master plan on treating medical wastes at hospitals, which will also specify the financial sources for each hospital.

More than 300,000 cubic metres of liquid waste and 600 tonnes of solid waste are required to be treated every day by 2015.

The HCM City People's Committee has instructed city agencies and district people's committees to study the investment required, operation, management, and technological solutions for installing waste treatment systems at public hospitals and clinics in the city.

City needs \$673m for flood control, irrigation

The HCM City People's Committee has asked the Government to allocate more funds to 16 flood-control and irrigation projects due for completion in 2015.

It also sought approval to mobilise funds for these projects, which are estimated to cost about VND14 trillion (US\$673 million).

Of that, VND13 trillion has been allocated for a dyke system to prevent flooding and regulate the tide in the Sai Gon River. The remaining VND1 trillion is required to dredge the river and canals around the city.

A lack of funds has hindered these works, the Steering Centre for Urban Flood Control Programme, said.

Craft village turns into big polluter

Business activity in the famous craft village of Hoai Hao in the central province of Binh Dinh was quiet for years until most of the producers decided to purchase advanced machinery.

Then production of rice paper, the village's main activity, rose in leaps and bounds, Nguyen Tinh, vice chairman of the People's Committee in Hoai Hao Commune, told Sai Gon Tiep Thi newspaper.

The rise in production, however, has taken a serious toll on the environment, largely due to untreated wastewater being discharged by 200 establishments that produce wheat flour.

There is not a single wastewater treatment system in the entire district of Hoai Nhon, in which Hoai Hao Commune is located.

Every day, an average of nearly 6,000 cubic metres of untreated wastewater are discharged into the commune's waterways or soil, according to Nguyen Thanh Hau, deputy head of Hoai Nhon's Natural Resources and Environment Office.

The agency's deputy head, Nguyen Viet Cuong, said inspection results of the Binh Dinh Province's Environmental Protection Agency showed that wastewater from rice flour producers in Hoai Hao Village contained a high concentration of cyanide, which is toxic to humans.

"This has severely contaminated underground water sources and rivers in the surrounding areas," said Cuong.

All the water wells in Hoai Nhon's Tan Thanh 2 Village, where 100 flour production establishments are located, are extremely polluted and can no longer be used, according to the commune's Natural Resources and Environment Office.

Recently, commune authorities closed 192 production establishments in Hoai Hao craft village.

The push for buying modern machinery was part of a larger industrial promotion programme in Binh Dinh Province that began in 2005.

Under the programme, many traditional craft villages that had been facing closure have been revived.

At least 38 craft villages are now flourishing, representing 70 per cent of the total number of villages planned for development in the province.

In the last five years, more than VND10 billion (US\$488,000) from the State budget and local funds have been invested in programmes to build new rural areas in the province.

Although higher incomes have helped reduce hunger and poverty in the province, pollution problems resulting from the development have not been handled properly.

The Bau Da rice wine village in An Nhon District, for example, is one of the most successful craft villages, but it is facing serious environmental pollution.

To make Bau Da rice wine, which has been produced for hundreds of years, local water sources are used. But the water is heavily contaminated because of the development of pig husbandry on Cu Lam Hamlet.

Nhon Loc Commune authorities were taking steps to prevent pollution from contaminating the underground water source in Cu Lam Bac as the water source was the key factor for the quality of Bau Da wine, said Cao Van Nghia, deputy head of the People's Committee of the commune in An Nhon District.

Binh Dinh provincial authorities told Sai Gon Tiep Thi that they were unsure about how to both develop craft villages and protect the environment.

"Closing down nearly 200 wheat flour production villages was a very hard decision to make," said the chairman of Hoai Nhon People's Committee, Nguyen Quoc Viet. "But it is necessary to make people take responsibility in protecting the environment."

Solutions

The provincial Science and Technology Department had many times sent experts to Hoai Hao to conduct research and find solutions to the pollution problem. But they had failed to come up with any proper measures, said Tinh.

The HCM City University of Technology and the City's Institute of Environment and Natural Resources have proposed a solution that can only be implemented on a small scale.

A programme supported by the Swedish government, which targets easing pollution in Hoai Hao, has been also carried out, but only on an experimental basis in 10 households.

Households themselves have been trying to upgrade their wastewater treatment systems with the support of the local administration.

Following these improvements, however, only 80 households in Hoai Hao have been allowed to resume production.

"Most of the households lack knowledge to run waste water treatment systems," said Cuong, "and they have been doing this grudgingly."

The province's environmentalists said if there were no comprehensive measures taken on managing wastewater treatment, long-term environmental protection would never occur.

Cuong proposed gathering all the craft producers into an industrial complex.

To help save water sources for making Bau Da wine, Cuong said, the provincial Environmental Protection Agency had asked the local administration to financially support residents so they could build underground biogas containers to treat waste water discharged from pig-husbandry establishments.

The agency has been co-ordinating with responsible local bodies to develop measures that would protect underground water sources.

Sonadezi spewing excessive wastewater

The Criminal Investigation Police under the Ministry of Public Security have disclosed that the Sonadezi Company in Long Thanh Industrial Zone of Dong Nai Province is spewing untreated wastewater into the Dong Nai River, far beyond permissible levels.

Earlier this month, it was discovered that the company had been dumping untreated wastewater into the Dong Nai River for the last many years.

The police tested wastewater samples from the company at the Institute of Natural Resources and Environment in the Ho Chi Minh City National University yesterday.

According to the police, the process method for releasing wastewater adopted by the Sonadezi Company also did not meet the required standards.

The number of households claiming damage compensation from the Sonadezi Company had increased to 140 by yesterday.

Nguyen Duc, chairman of the Dong Nai Province Lawyers' Association said that the affected households can begin proceedings against Sonadezi at the People's Court in Long Thanh District, if they can produce evidence of damage incurred.

They can also petition Dong Nai Newspapers and the lawyers association for free assistance in suing the Sonadezi Company, added Duc.

Delta faces high erosion threat

Erosion of riverbanks in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta poses a serious threat this year, experts warn.

In Dong Thap Province, land erosions occurred in three places in Hong Ngu District last month, affecting 10 houses and eroding 40m of dykes in Long Khanh A and Long Thuan communes.

Le Van Hung, head of the province Flood and Storm Prevention and Control and Search and Rescue Committee's Steering Board Office, said land erosions were threatening nearly 100 sites and thousands of houses along rivers.

Hung said land erosions had reached an 'alarming' level.

The provincial People's Committee recently ordered the relocation of nearly 3,000 families living in erosion-prone areas.

An Giang Province has 56 sites threatened by erosion, 14 sites more than in 2009.

In the past, severe land erosion only occurred in An Giang and Dong Thap, the two upstream provinces, but it has now spread to in Vinh Long, Soc Trang, Tra Vinh and Ca Mau provinces, according to the Department for Evaluation and Assessment of Environmental Impact.

Landslides have started to occur in several places even in the dry season in recent years.

Tran Anh Thu, deputy director of the An Giang Department of Natural Resources and Environment, said land erosion would be the worst ever this year.

It would be severe at the end of this year's flooding season because of the overexploitation of sand from riverbeds and climate change, the experts said.

They blamed this on the shortage of human resources to manage the sand mining and the lack of punishment.

Every year, erosions along riverbanks claim more than 300ha of land.

But all local authorities do is survey areas that are at risk of erosion and encourage residents there to move to safer areas.

But even this proves difficult because most people living along rivers and canals are very poor while funds for relocating them are limited, the authorities complain.

In Ben Tre Province alone, 9,000 households need to be moved out of erosion-prone areas.

By the end of last year, An Giang had moved around 3,700 households, but this figure is insignificant compared to the total number that have to be relocated, according to the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

HCM City eyes energy from waste

As HCM City residents and businesses dump huge volumes of waste every day, authorities are exploring ways to generate energy from waste.

A report by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment said efforts have been made to generate power and collect methane from landfills around the city.

Dr Nguyen Trung Viet, head of the department's Solid Waste Management Division, said a power generation facility based in the Go Cat landfill since 2005 had been generating 0.95MW.

It has a capacity of 25MW.

Go Cat is among the five rubbish dumps that have been closed, the others being Dong Thanh, Phuoc Hiep 1, Phuoc Hiep, and Da Phuoc.

Viet said the energy potential of land-fill waste, including by using gases collected from them, burning waste for electricity, and collecting methane for fuel, was huge since the city generated around 7,500 tonnes of solid waste every day.

"Producing renewable energy from waste is economically and technically feasible when the waste is highly bio-degradable and contains moisture," he said.

"Gases emitted by landfills contain around 65 per cent methane.

"The city endures the pollution from waste for a long time and spends more than VND700 billion (US\$34 million) each year to treat waste. It means the city has wasted thousands of billions of dong to destroy sources of renewable energy."

Keppel Seghers of Singapore and the local Tam Sinh Nghia Joint-stock Company plan to build two power plants operated by burning solid waste which can generate a combined 80MW.

Each plant will use 2,000 tonnes of waste a day at full capacity.

Viet said the city was seeking investment in generating energy from waste, and several companies from the US and South Korea were interested. The projects have been held up only because of the low price of 4 cent for a KWh of electricity offered by the Electricity of Viet Nam (EVN), he said.

Addressing a workshop on the development of HCM City into a low-carbon society, Prof Seiichi Ishikawa of the Japanese University of Kitakyushu's environmental engineering faculty said the city should have a better collection system to achieve the 3R's – recycle, reuse, and reduce.

That would help improve treatment at the landfills for energy recovery, he added.

New Green tax to fight pollution

Environment protection tax (EPT) will be imposed next year on products classified as hazardous to the environment. The move is expected to encourage enterprises to make more "green" products.

The law, which will come into effect on January 1 covers eight groups of products, including oil and petrol, coal, hydro-chloro-fluoro-carbon (HCFC) solution, plastic bags and chemical substances of restricted use such as herbicides, pesticides, disinfectants and preservatives.

"The imposition of the EPT will help raise awareness for environment protection of the whole society towards environmentally friendly products," said Deputy Minister of Finance Do Hoang Anh Tuan.

Enterprises would be encouraged to renovate their production technology, aiming at turning into green businesses, according to Chas Roy Chowdhury, head of the UK Association of Chartered Certified Accountants' Taxation Department at a recent conference in HCM City.

In addition, the EPT would also help gradually form the consumer habit of seeking and using environmentally friendly products, he said.

Under the law, each litre of oil and petrol will be taxed at a rate ranging from VND1,000 – 4,000 (US\$0.048 – 0.2). The current environment protection fee applied to oil and petrol will be dropped out and replaced by the EPT.

The ministry estimated that the EPT imposed on oil and petrol would reach VND12 trillion (\$572 million) in 2012, 14 per cent higher than environment fees collected during 2010. The current environment protection fee applied to each litre of oil and petrol ranges from VND300 (\$0.015) to VND1,000 (\$0.046) and some kinds are not taxed at all.

However, the law on the EPT failed to cover all products classified to be hazardous to the environment, such as cigarettes, fertilisers, detergents and batteries.

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the list of products to be included in the tax is open, and products will be added when necessary by the ratification of the National Assembly.

A research on the possible impact of the EPT on Viet Nam's economy conducted by Nguyen Van Chan from the Viet Nam National Economics University and Ian Coxhead from the University of Wisconsin – Madison revealed that the EPT might increase the Government revenues by about 3.5 per cent.

Meanwhile, there would be a decline in the gross domestic product (GDP) of 0.8 per cent in the short run, along with a rise in the inflation rate by between 0.4 per cent and 0.7 per cent.

The study also revealed that the industries directly targeted by the tax would be seriously affected with a 1.7 per cent dip in coal production output and a 8.6 per cent drop for gasoline, for instance. As a consequence, the price of transport would increase by 1 per cent, which might raise costs throughout the entire economy, the study stated.

The price of plastic bags would be doubled when the tax is applied, which may reduce consumption as well as turnover, said an official from Thuan Phat Company in Ha Noi – a plastic bag producer. The enterprise might be urged to think of ways to begin producing environmentally friendly products, he said.

Hoang Thuy Trang, a consumer living in Hoang Mai District, Ha Noi, said she would prefer to use environmentally-friendly bags to plastic bags when going shopping at supermarkets. She reasoned that it could help protect the environment.

The improvement in the environment and quality of life will be undeniable when the law comes into effect, according to President of the Viet Nam Tax Consultants' Association Nguyen Thi Cuc.

"The transparency and close control in the enforcement of law is important to create public confidence in the Government's EPT – related policies," she said.

The Government should use the revenue from the EPT to compensate for residents through investment in infrastructure and implementing measures to protect the environment as well as social affairs, Cuc added.

The estimated revenue from the EPT would be VND57 trillion (\$2.7 billion) per year.

Plan to move firms polluting Dong Nai

The ageing Bien Hoa 1 Industrial Zone in the southern province of Dong Nai will be converted into an urban trade-and-services area to help stop continued pollution of Dong Nai River with factory waste.

The river, which runs through 12 provinces, is the main water supply for more than 10 million people living in the river basin and the people of HCM City.

The contamination has risen to alarming levels after 30 or 40 years' pollution from many industrial zones along the Dong Nai River basin, according to deputy director of the Dong Nai Centre for Environmental Observations and Engineering, Le Viet Binh.

More than 100 industrial zones in the basin discharge millions of cubic metres of waste-water into the river each day.

During the next 10 years, 100 factories from Bien Hoa 1 Industrial Zone will be relocated, according to the provincial People's Committee.

The project, to cost VND19.99 trillion (US\$809 million), is being undertaken to stop waste water from the factories being discharged into Dong Nai River,

The 320-ha Bien Hoa 1 Industrial Zone, the first industrial zone in the southern part of Viet Nam, was established in 1963.

However, it lacks an effective waste-water treatment system. The existing system is described as outdated.

The zone's waste-water has, for years, been discharged directly into the river, creating serious pollution. "It's time to take action to protect the environment," said chairman of the provincial People's Committee, Dinh Quoc Thai.

Under the project, more than 100 factories will be moved to Giang Dien Industrial Zone in Trang Bom District, and other industrial zones in the province, including Nhon Trach No 1, 2, 3, 4 and Ong Keo.

The relocation will start later this year and will be completed by 2022 as the urban trade and services zone is established. The project has met with approval from most of the enterprises, said Thai. The province will provide the transferred industries with compensation, support and a high level of incentives to make the move.

According to Do Thi Thu Hang, chairwoman of the board of the Management Development Corporation for the Bien Hoa Industrial Zone (Sonadezi), this will amount to about VND3.7 trillion (\$176 million) in total.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment said the present amount of waste-water pumped into the river amounted to about 8,600 cubic metre per day.

After many fines for polluting the environment and related violations, industrialists claim that 95 per cent of waste-water is treated before being released.

However, an analysis of water samples taken from the Dong Nai River has revealed contamination still exceeds permitted levels. This has largely been blamed on effluent from 10 factories in the zone, said the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

Better pollution rules urged

Experts have called for professionalizing environmental management and protection and scrapping contradictory environmental regulations.

They told a seminar held in HCM City last Friday to review the Government's management of the environment that it is necessary to have proper delegation of authority and close co-ordination among relevant ministries and local environmental protection agencies.

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Bui Cach Tuyen said much progress has been made by the Government in managing the environment, with the result that pollution had declined sharply.

There were comprehensive policies for managing the environment, especially laws on its protection and bio-diversity, he said. "Pollution in urban areas, industrial zones, craft villages and river basins have gradually been brought under control," Tuyen said.

Officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment said, however, that there remained a lot of shortcomings in environmental management that need to be addressed to achieve sustainable development.

Delegation and decentralization of authority had not been carried out properly, they said, while the management system at both the national and local levels was incomplete, leading to a shortage of high-calibre environmental officials.

Awareness of environmental protection among industry and the public was low and nothing was being done to mitigate this, they added.

Delegates blamed the poor management and lack of comprehensive policies for the increasing pollution of major rivers by industrial parks and enterprises who dump untreated waste.

Taiwanese-owned food seasoning maker Vedan is the biggest offender caught so far. It discharged untreated wastewater for 14 years into the Thi Vai River in Dong Nai Province near HCM City.

The pollution, discovered three years ago, caused losses estimated at VND1.7 trillion (US\$82.5 million) to farmers. Recent instances of pollution that have come to light were by the State-owned Sonadezi company and Thai Tuan Group's textile and dyeing plant. The former was caught red-handed discharging wastewater into the Dong Nai River in Dong Nai, and the latter into the Tham Luong Canal in HCM City's District 12.

Tuyen said: "Having policies and legal documents to comprehensively and scientifically protect the environment is extremely necessary amid the pollution." Environmentalists suggested measures to create an effective and comprehensive environmental management system by the Government.

Most agreed that the 2005 Law on Environment Protection needed to be reviewed and amended. They called for spelling out the responsibilities and roles of ministries and local agencies in enforcing environmental protection policies. They also called for strengthening the role of the departments of Natural Resources and Environment in the southern region in advising provincial People's Committees on environmental protection.

Developing a long-term strategy for training environmental officials at all levels was also a key necessity, they added.

Garment maker discharges waste

A big textile and garment corporation in HCM City was caught last week discharging its untreated wastewater directly to the Tham Luong Canal.

Last Wednesday, the national environmental police department found the Thai Tuan Corporation releasing reddish untreated wastewater, from which hot vapours were emanating, into the canal after diluting it with clean water.

The police found two pipes discharging the wastewater and clean water respectively into a ditch that ran into the canal. However, the company's deputy general director Le Thuc Hoai denied that it was production waste that the company was discharging. He said it was water used to wash the machines and warehouses.

Police also found the waste water pipe in a dyeing facility installed with two valves, one releasing contents into a waste treatment reservoir and the other that would allow the waste to flow directly into the canal.

Col Phan Huu Vinh, deputy director of the environment police department's southern office, said police would have samples tested to determine the degree of pollution caused by the corporation.

Meanwhile, corporation chairman and general director Thai Tuan Chi claimed in an interview with Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper that the problem was a "misunderstanding" by the corporation.

He said they had not considered water from washing the machines and warehouses wastewater that needed to be treated. The question of two valves for releasing effluents into different areas was ignored.

Meanwhile, Hoai admitted that the corporation had not managed well its hazardous waste, residue oil used by boilers. The case, which is being investigated further before final conclusions are drawn, is expected to have a negative impact on the hitherto prestigious Thai Tuan brand name.

Following inspections of the corporation's premises last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, environmental inspectors found many other private textile and garment factories nearby discharging wastewater directly into the canal.

The Thanh Duan Factory, for instance, operated 10 dyeing boilers for 5,000m of fabric a day and discharged its waste into the canal through three pipes.

A haphazard cluster of seven other factories were also found at the site, making up a small, unregistered industrial park of their own. These factories were also discharging their waste directly into the canal. The Tham Luong Canal, which runs through the districts of Tan Phu, Tan Binh, 12 and Go Vap of the city, has been heavily polluted by wastewater for several decades now.

According to Lt Col Lam Hieu Nghia of the HCM City environment police, 100 per cent of the companies and factories engaged in weaving and dyeing operations in the city were violating regulations on the discharge of effluents and other waste. The latest findings follow on the heels of a major environmental scandal involving the industrial park developer Sonadezi in Dong Nai Province.

Sonadezi was found using its wastewater treatment facility to release untreated waste into the Dong Nai River.

Waste treatment causes pollution

Waste water treatment stations in central Da Nang City that were set up to reduce pollution in the city are themselves causing environmental pollution.

Local residents are increasingly concerned about the pollution caused by Phu Loc station in Thanh Khe District's Thanh Khe Tay Ward and Tho Quang station in Son Tra District.

Pham Duc Muoi, a resident of Thanh Khe Tay Ward, said Phu Loc waste water treatment facility often discharged waste water into the Phu Loc River. The discharged water had a noxious smell, disturbing residents' lives, especially on sunny days, when the smell was the worst.

Pham Thanh Duoc, head of the station, said the facility had a capacity to treat 28,000cu.m of waste water each day, and at present it was only operating at 70 per cent of its capacity.

Duoc said local residents were so upset at the smell that they recently blocked a manhole at the station.

Chief of the municipal Department of Natural Resources and Environment's Office Nguyen Thai A said the bad smell was caused by a side-effect of waste treatment technology.

"To deal with the stench, the Da Nang City People's Committee will build a 200-metre underground sewer line so that the sewage from the station can be discharged into the sea, and the smell will not affect residents," he said.

Work on the project will begin next month.

Tho Quang waste water treatment station, managed by Quoc Viet Company, was also considered a 'hot spot' of environmental pollution as waste water discharged from the station also produced a stench.

Following complaints from local residents, on July 5 the Son Tra District authorities checked the station's waste water and found that the amount of coliform and ammonium exceeded regulated levels by 6 to 231 times.

City authorities had previously allowed Quoc Viet Company to widen the station, and increase the station's capacity from 3,000cu.m to 10,000cu.m a day. The company was also approved to borrow money with preferential interest rates to upgrade the station.

Last month the city's Environmental Police carried out an unscheduled inspection and found that Quoc Viet Company was discharging untreated waste water into the environment. The company was fined VND150 million (US\$7,320) for the violation.

The municipal People's Committee also fined a number of enterprises in Tho Quang Industrial Zone.

Flooded streets slow life in HCMC

Two hours of intense heavy rainfall in Ho Chi Minh City yesterday afternoon resulted in submerged streets, traffic gridlock and stranded motorcyclists.

Cars and motorcycles broke down along many streets causing further traffic chaos. Streets like Dinh Bo Linh, Bui Huu Nghia and Xo Viet Nghe Tinh were submerged under 0.5 meters of water in Binh Thanh District.

Tran Hung Dao, Chau Van Liem and Hong Bang Streets in District 5, Thanh Thai, 3 Thang 2 and Le Hong Phong in District 10 and Tan Hoa Dong, Ba Hom and An Duong Vuong in District 6 were all under water, with many sections of the streets facing higher levels of flooding, where waters submerged even the pavements and flowed into peoples' homes.

Dozens of motorcycles broke down along Kha Van Can Street in Thu Duc District and Le Van Viet Street in District 9 which were under 0.5 metres of water. Many drivers pushed their bikes to higher ground and awaited the waters to recede.

Local people have reconciled this as a regular feature after a bout of heavy rain. All throughout the rainy season, they struggle to prevent floodwaters from flowing into their homes.

The sluice system proved ineffective in draining floodwaters into the Tan Hoa-Lo Gom Canal in districts 6, 11 and Tan Phu as seen in yesterday's rainfall. While city streets were lying submerged under floodwaters, the canal saw little water flowing into it!

US investor to build \$700m waste treatment complex near HCM City

Local authorities yesterday discussed with an American investor about a US\$700 million waste treatment project to be built in Long An Province, some 30km west of HCM City.

A delegation from the Long An People's Council discussed the progress of the Tan Thanh Waste Treatment Complex project with representatives of HCM City's Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

The Viet Nam Waste Solutions Co (VWS) was accredited by the Government to build waste-treatment facilities with green technology in July 2010.

VWS will invest \$700 million in the waste treatment complex, expected to be one of the largest in Southeast Asia. It is located on 1,760ha in Tan Lap Commune in Long An's Thu Thua District.

Discussions included project application and assessment, waste treatment technology, categories of waste to be treated at the complex, means of waste transport, environmental impact assessment of the project, ratio of waste to be buried and waste recycling.

According to a report released at the meeting by Nguyen Van Phuoc, deputy director of HCM City Department of Natural Resources and Environment, the Tan Thanh Complex was designed to treat solid waste, excluding toxic waste, from Long An, HCM City and other provinces in the Southern key economic zone.

When operational, the complex can receive about two-thirds of solid waste discharged from Long An and a third from HCM City. It will be able to treat 10,000 to 15,000 tonnes of waste per day, said Phuoc.

Waste from the city can be transported to the treatment complex by truck, traveling from HCM City to Thu Thua Town, and another 10km (not yet built) road from Thu Thua to the complex.

It can also be transported by another road from Ba Hom Street in Binh Chanh District to Duc Hoa Town in Long An, and from there to the complex.

Waterway transport

The HCM City Department of Natural Resources and Environment is seeking the shortest waterway for transporting waste from the city to the complex.

Darryl Petker, director of VWS' Long An Project Development, said American specialists are conducting geological surveys at the site of the complex in Long An.

The investment period will last 20 years and when construction is complete the complex will be operational for 75 to 100 years, according to VWS figures.

During the meeting, the Long An People's Council delegation also visited Da Phuoc Waste Treatment Facility, currently run by VWS in HCM City's Binh Chanh District.

David Duong, president of the management board and CEO of VWS, also runs the California Waste Solutions Co in the US, which took 37th place in Waste Age magazine's ranking of the top 100 American companies in the waste transportation and treatment industry. — VNS

Hospitals told to treat medical waste

All hospitals in HCM City have to install medical wastewater treatment facilities meeting national standards by the end of this year or face the prospect of being shut down, the city's Health Department said on Tuesday.

Addressing a meeting on waste treatment plants at health care facilities in the city, Pham Viet Thanh, head of the health department, said inspections would be carried out at the end of the year to ensure compliance with the order.

Strict action would be taken against those who are found polluting the environment by not installing the systems, he said. The department will install medical wastewater treatment systems at health centers in 238 out of 322 wards and communes in the city by the end of this year. The rest will have them by the end of next year.

Preventive medicine centers in all districts in the city would have medical wastewater treatment systems by the end of this year, Thanh said.

In HCM City, every district has a hospital and a preventive medicine centre. Communes and wards have health centers.

For the health centers, the city People's Committee has tasked infrastructure management boards at the district level to oversee installation of medical wastewater treatment systems using Japanese technology, Thanh said.

Each health centre would have systems with the capacity of 2cu.m per day and the total capital for all the wards and communes was estimated at VND100 billion (US\$4.8 million), he said.

Currently, most of the health centres discharge their wastewater into the city's common sewage pit.

The city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment said that hospitals in the city discharged around 23,000cu.m of medical wastewater, most of which was not treated.

HCM City last year had only 52 of 113 private and public hospitals with wastewater treatment systems meeting set standards. Forty of these 113 hospitals had the system but failed to meet the standard, including hospitals at the central level.

More than 7,200 small and large-sized health clinics only had rudimentary wastewater treatment systems.

Nguyen Tan Phong, deputy head of the HCM City University of Technology's Environment Faculty, told the Sai Gon Tiep Thi (Sai Gon Marketing) newspaper that medical wastewater contained 20 per cent of hazardous waste.

If this hazardous waste was not treated well, it was dangerous for the environment and posed a health risk for residents, he added.

Dang Ngoc Chanh, head of the HCM City Public Health and Hygiene Institute's environment health faculty, said that the institute last year took samples of wastewater from four hospitals with the standard wastewater treatment system and analysed them. The results showed that all treated wastewater met bacterial standards but the ammoniac standards were double the limit, he said, adding that if the substance was discharged into rivers, lakes or ponds, it could kill fish and shrimp.

Titanium mining suspended over environment fears

The Government has ordered a halt in licensing titanium ore exploration and exploitation in south central Binh Thuan Province, with a view to ensure local environmental preservation. In a document released on Tuesday, Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai gave concrete instruction to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as well as Binh Thuan People's Committee.

The move came following rampant exploitation throughout the province, known for its vast amounts of titanium.

According to Dao Thanh Binh, deputy director of the environmental ministry's Department for Mineral Control, exploitation has been carried out on a scale far exceeding legal and sustainable limits.

Reports have shown that Binh Thuan holds the largest titanium reserves in Southeast Asia, with 558 million tonnes spanning a total area of 774sq.m, according to Huynh Giac, director of the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

The reserves have been valued at around US\$138 billion, according to mineral experts.

While only 20 units had been allowed to exploit titanium ore at a total volume of 500,000 tonnes in the province, hundreds of local residents had been illegally exploiting the mineral every day, trading it at VND300,000-400,000 (\$14.6-19.5) a kilo, Giac said.

"Halting titanium exploitation is an effective measure in fighting illegal activity and effectively managing operations," he added.

Furthermore, as huge volumes of water were used in exploiting and cleansing titanium ore, water sources had become increasingly polluted, causing a huge health risk to local people and workers, Giac said.

Titanium is a valuable metal used in more than 30 different industrial sectors including plane manufacture, aeronautics and in the production of oil and gas exploitation equipment.

Can Tho drowns in medical waste

The treatment and disposal of medical waste has become a serious problem in the southern city of Can Tho.

The healthcare system suffers from a plethora of problems in this regard. It lacks medical waste treatment facilities and existing ones use outdated technology.

Therefore, the few facilities that are running are overloaded with waste from the city's hospitals, polluting the environment and badly affecting many people's livelihoods.

Most hospitals in the city do not have their own waste treatment systems, according to a Can Tho health department official.

Of the 22 hospitals in Can Tho, only eight had solid medical waste treatment furnaces on their premises, and these were all small-scale, said Doan Anh Luan, head of the department's Healthcare Specialisation Office.

All the remaining hospitals and hundreds of private medical and healthcare centres had their medical waste dumped and incinerated like ordinary waste.

About one tonne of toxic medical waste is discharged every day by healthcare centres in the city's urban districts alone, according to the Can Tho City Health Department.

An estimated 2.24 tonnes of medical waste are collected every day in the entire city, of which toxic wastes make up 25 per cent.

The treatment of toxic medical waste differs very much from that of the ordinary medical waste that can be burnt or treated like any other kind of normal waste generated by households, according to Luan.

The hazardous medical waste is classified into different types according to their origin, nature and category, including infectious and radioactive, before being transported to the collection venue if they are not treated on the spot.

The transportation, and the whole process of treating this kind of waste must meet requirements set by the Ministry of Health, and they can only be treated by centres granted with permission by the ministry.

All the medical waste from the city's hospitals used to be treated at the Can Tho General Hospital's waste treatment facility, hospital director Dang Quang Tam told the Sai Gon Giai Phong (Liberated Sai Gon) newspaper.

However, the treatment furnace, with outdated technology and limited capacity, could not meet the increasing quantity it was receiving from the hospitals. Its storage space was overloaded and began polluting the surrounding environment, Tam said.

The Can Tho General Hospital was fined by city authorities for violating environment protection rules and its waste treatment centre has been closed since early last month for upgrading.

The hospitals then signed contracts with the Sao Viet Environment Joint Stock Company, based in the southern coastal province of Vung Tau, to have their waste collected and treated.

There was no large-scale medical waste treatment centre in Can Tho and the city's neighbouring provinces, said Luan, explaining the decision.

It costs Can Tho hospitals VND25,000 to have 1kg of medical waste treated, double what they paid the Can Tho General Hospital, he said, but they had no choice.

Storing a problem

But after almost three weeks of treating the medical waste from Can Tho's hospitals, the Sao Viet Company terminated the contracts because its sub-contractor in Can Tho was caught stocking toxic medical solid waste.

In a surprise check carried out on the storage facility of the Tay Nam Environment Company Ltd, Sao Viet's affiliate in Can Tho, city inspectors on July 19 found nearly two tonnes of medical waste including cylinders, needles and swabs.

The search, carried out following people's complaints, also unearthed boxes and packages of rotten and stinking body organs.

The Sao Viet Company said that to reduce their transport costs, it stored the medical waste to 4-5 tonnes in their stockhouse which did not meet the storage standard. The waste polluted the environment and affected the livelihoods of people living around that area, according to the Can Tho Public Security's Environmental Police Office.

The city's Police Department has requested its head to hand down the heaviest punishment on Sao Viet's violation.

Following the termination of contracts with Sao Viet, the hospitals in Can Tho have seen their medical solid waste pile up. The Can Tho General Hospital leads the pack with between 200-300kg per day.

The hospital's waste storage facilities have been overloaded and the ensuing spillage into open spaces has polluted the surrounding environment since the Sao Viet's operation was suspended, according to the hospital's deputy director, Le Van Dat.

Some of the waste has been transported, although not by permitted vehicles, to another hospital in the city's Thot Not District for treatment, said Dat. "We do not know where else we can take the medical waste for treatment."

It is estimated that the hospitals in Can Tho urban region have to spend VND750 million (US\$36,400) a month on waste treatment. To establish a medical waste treatment facility (furnace) with advanced Japanese technology that has a capacity of 50kg per hour, it would cost the hospitals around VND1 billion.

Building a central furnace for treating medical waste is the best solution to the problem that should be implemented urgently, said head of the Environmental Police Office Le Van Chi.

This would help deal effectively with the problem as the waste would not be stored and transported over a distance, which would easily cause pollution, he said.

Chi said it was not easy for authorities to make sure if the medical waste was properly transported to the treatment site. Once the facilities are out of the city, the safety of the transportation was no longer under their control, he said.

Concurring with Chi, Luan urged the city to give top priority to building a hi-tech medical waste treatment facility.

Improper medical waste treatment would badly affect the people's health and livelihoods in the long term, said Luan.

He suggested that if the Government cannot manage the investment on its own, it can invite the private sector's participation.

Most of the medical waste in Viet Nam is treated using incinerators in which all the waste is burned at very high temperatures, according to the website run by Biotech Viet Nam.

However, this technology creates dioxin, a toxic chemical that poses high risk for hormonal disorders in human beings and related diseases. It also creates ashes equal to 10 per cent of the original waste quantity.

Apart from generating other harmful waste for the human and environment, the burning technology also involves huge initial investments and is not energy efficient, according to the website of BioTech Viet Nam, a distributor of healthcare products.

This is one of the reasons why the United Nations and the World Health Organisation have recommended the application of the pasteurisation technology instead of burning, the website says.

The cost for a pasteurisation furnace is half that of a burning furnace and is also more energy efficient. The technology is widely used in developed countries, the company says.

Mekong floodwaters rise rapidly

Floodwaters from the upper stream of the Tien and Hau rivers, the main tributaries of the Mekong River, are threatening thousands of ha of the autumn-winter rice crop.

High tides combined with heavy rains have caused floods to rise quickly in the upper-stream districts of An Giang and Dong Thap provinces, according to the Southern Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting.

In An Giang, the water level of Tien River in Tan Chau Station rose to 3.83 metres last Saturday and the water level of Hau River in Chau Doc Station reached 3.15 metres.

Vo Thanh, director of the An Giang Province Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting, said floodwater levels would increase by 3-5 cm a day in the coming days.

Rapidly rising floods are threatening thousands of ha of newly planted rice in An Giang, Dong Thap, Kien Giang and Long An provinces as well as Can Tho City.

Dong Thap Province is facing the highest risk as it has 90,000 ha of newly planted rice.

Duong Nghia Quoc, director of the Dong Thap Province's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, said the province planted a total of 100,000 ha of autumn-winter rice crop. Dykes surround all rice planting areas.

The province's districts are upgrading weak dykes to protect the autumn-winter rice crop.

Chau Thanh District alone has about 5,000 ha of rice surrounded by weak dykes.

Farmers in the Delta have planted about 600,000 ha of autumn-winter rice crop, an increase of 100,000 ha against last year.

The Central Steering Committee for Flood Prevention and Control has ordered provinces to provide information about the situation of flood to local residents, relocate households in flood-prone areas and upgrade dykes and sluice gates.

The central steering committee has also instructed localities to set up plans to pump floodwater from rice fields to protect the rice crop and ensure sufficient number of facilities and human resources for rescue activities.

Nguyen Van Duong, deputy chairman of the Dong Thap Province People's Committee, said the flooded districts of Tan Hong, Hong Ngu, Tam Nong and Thap Muoi had organised 336 sites to ensure the safety of nearly 6,000 children.

The province has also set up 462 rescue teams with 4,200 members. Of the 462 rescue teams, 250 are working round the clock at critical sites.

The province's Steering Committee for Flood Prevention and Control has also ordered localities to urgently relocate 2,700 households in landslide-prone areas into flood-proof areas, Duong said.

Landslide fatalities prompt safety moves

Six people including two 11-year-olds died in cave-ins and a landslide in the last two days in the northern mountainous provinces of Lao Cai and Yen Bai and in HCM City.

The children were buried alive yesterday at a construction site in Yen Bai Province's Van Yen District.

They were playing on the site regardless of several warnings from the owners.

Another cave-in killed three Hoang Lan building company workers at a house construction site in Lao Cai Province's Van Ban District yesterday afternoon.

The workers were having lunch near earthworks carried out by the owner when it caved in and buried them.

On the same day, HCM City rescue teams recovered the body of a 55-year-old man buried by a landslide beside the Rach Doi River in Nha Be District.

The landslide on Sunday night swept away five houses causing losses worth VND700 million (US\$34,000).

Before the landslides, statistics from the General Statistics Office showed natural calamities had killed and injured seven and caused damage worth VND225 billion (\$10.9 million) nationwide since the beginning of this month.

Central Nghe An Province suffered the biggest losses with 18km of dykes and roads collapsed and 2,200ha of rice damaged, the statistics showed.

In a related move, the Ha Noi People's Committee plans by 2015 to remove 1,300 households living in areas at a high risk of landslides.

The committee has also scheduled to build stone embankment systems to protect another 3,000 households.

From 2016-20, the city will improve protection against natural calamities and stabilise production for around 28,000 households in flood-hit areas. It had killed and injured seven and caused damage worth VND225 billion (\$10.9 million) nationwide since the beginning of this month.

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