

Press Review 11/2011 - Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology,

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| 2 | Plant found dumping untreated wastewater | 4/11/2011 | VN News | Hai Phong | Waste | The Hai Phong Thermoelectric Plant located in the northern port of Hai Phong City's Thuy Nguyen District was found to be releasing untreated wastewater and oil into Bach Dang River earlier this week |
| 3 | Company ordered to treat exhaust fumes | 4/11/2011 | VN News | Dong Nai | Pollution | Dong Nai Province's People's Committee has instructed bakery and yeast producer AB Mauri Viet Nam to take urgent measures to prevent environmental pollution. |
| 4 | Environment needs better protection | 5/11/2011 | VN News | Hanoi | Environment | Enhanced environmental protection tools need to be applied in an effort to ease the nation's chronic pollution problem, according to experts at the workshop held by MONRE in Ha Noi on Friday. |
| 5 | Farmers go green with waste-fuelled cooking stoves | 7/11/2011 | VN News | Phu Tho | Environment | Engineer Bui Trong Tuan, from Viet Tri City, first introduced his groundbreaking cooking stove, fuelled by agricultural waste, during the course of last year. |
| 6 | Businesses commit to combat climate change | 8/11/2011 | VN Plus | Mekong Delta | Climate Change | WWF and the German Embassy in Vietnam launched the Mekong Delta Business Forum to engage the business sector in initiatives to respond to climate change in the Mekong delta. |
| 7 | Experts warn Vietnam seriously lacks water | 8/11/2011 | Vfej | Vietnam | Water Resources | Vietnam has been officially added into the list of the nationals that face the water shortage. |
| 8 | Companies confront climate change | 8/11/2011 | VN News | Mekong Delta | Climate Change | Representatives of about 40 companies participated in yesterday's launch of Mekong Delta Business Forum in HCM City. |



MOST-BMBF Office for
Water+Environmental Technology

Vietnamese – German Office for Water and Environmental Technology

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| 9 | Pollution shrinks villagers' lifespan by 10 years | 9/11/2011 | Youth News | Vietnam | Pollution | Serious environmental pollution has shrunk the average lifespan of local inhabitants in many trade villages and economic zones by 10 years compared with the country's overall life expectancy. |
| 10 | Four polluting factories shut in HCM City | 11/11/2011 | VN News | HCM | Pollution | Four polluting factories in HCM City were forced to suspend operations by having their power supply cut and their machinery and equipment sealed, the municipal DONRE has announced. |
| 11 | WB special envoy on climate change visits VN | 12/11/2011 | VN Plus | Vietnam | Climate Change | The World Bank's Special Envoy on climate change Andrew Steer is on a visit to Vietnam to assess impacts of climate change on the Southeast Asian country. |
| 12 | Mekong to develop flood-proof housing | 12/11/2011 | VN News | An Giang | Environment | Deputy Minister of Construction Nguyen Tran Nam yesterday asked Mekong Delta provinces to speed up work on construction of housing foundations, dykes and infrastructure for flood-proof residential clusters. |
| 13 | Centre to promote climate technology | 16/11/2011 | VN Net Bridge | Vietnam | Environment | A climate innovation centre will be set up in VN to promote climate technology by offering venture finance and other support for small and medium enterprises. |
| 14 | Sitting on huge reserves of titanium, living together with pollution | 17/11/2011 | Labor News | Binh Thuan | Environment | Overexploitation, unreasonable investment and mismanagement on titanium mining areas all have caused big consequences to the environment in Binh Thuan province. |
| 15 | Locals clamor for tougher action against polluter | 18/11/2011 | VN Net Bridge | Dong Nai | Pollution | Residents in a commune in Dong Nai Province demand the polluting company, AB Mauri Vietnam, be shut down if it continues causing pollution problems. |



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| 16 | City garbage-fee programme fails | 22/11/2011 | VN News | HCM | Environment | Two years after the introduction of Government Decree 88, HCM City has not managed to meet its targeted amount of collection fees for environmental hygiene and protection. |
| 17 | New conditions for medical waste | 22/11/2011 | VN News | HCM | Waste Treatment | A draft master plan on medical waste management seeks to impose new conditions and limits on storage and treatment on hospitals and other healthcare facilities in HCM City. |
| 18 | The draft planning of environment protection of the Nhue – Day river basin in 2015 and orientations to 2020 | 25/11/2011 | VEA | Nhue Day River Basin | Environment | Department of Waste Management and Environment Improvement of the Vietnam Environment Administration (VEA) held a consultation workshop on the draft planning of environment protection of the Nhue - Day river basin in 2015 and orientations to 2020. |
| 19 | Coast management to be integrated | 25/11/2011 | VN News | HCM | Climate Change | Integrated management of coastal areas would help conserve and sustainably use marine and coastal biodiversity and better cope with climate change, especially in Mekong Delta. |
| 20 | Waste removal workers face multiple serious health risks | 26/11/2011 | VN News | HCM | Waste | Waste pickers and recyclers in the informal sector are at risk of contracting and transmitting several diseases that can be deemed occupational hazards, according to initial results of a survey released. |
| 21 | Floods ravage central region for second time in November | 28/11/2011 | VN News | Hanoi | Environment | Floods, triggered by torrential rain, have ravaged the central region over the weekend, with a countless number of houses and rice crops inundated or destroyed. |



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HCM City worried stiff about depleted water resources

Dwellers in HCM City, who once took pride of the plentiful water resource, now feel worried about the rapid decreases of the natural resource.

Under the water resource management strategy of HCM City, by 2010, the city would improve the polluted surface water and set limitation on the exploitation output in order to preserve the underground water resources. However, it is now clear that the city has failed completely to fulfill the plan: the water resources are getting depleted, while the quality of the water is getting worse.

River water polluted, underground water exhausted

The Saigon and Dong Nai rivers, the main water supply sources for HCM City, are suffering high microbiological and organic pollution. Every day, the rivers receive more than 3 million cubic meters of domestic and industrial waste water, most of which remain untreated, and hundreds of tons of solid waste from the city and the upstream.

Scientists have warned that they can see many stretches of rivers becoming “dead rivers” because they cannot be capable more to deal with the pollution.

Meanwhile, the climate change with the sea water level rise has led to the deep and prolonged salinity intrusion to the river system. The same situation has been occurring with underground water: the pollution has been penetrating into different water layers, especially in industrial production areas and residential quarters.

The profuse water resources are considered one of the biggest advantages for development of the city. The annual rainfall is relatively high at 1935 mm, while the water reserves of the Dong Nai river system can provide 38.6 billion of cubic meters a year, and the sage underground water reserves for exploitation is 0.8 million of cubic meters per day.

However, it is the profuse water resources which have led to the overexploitation and overuse of water.

The problem is that though the annual rainfall is high, but rains only come within four months of the raining season, where rain water cannot be stored and causes floods. Meanwhile, the city seriously lack water in the dry season.

In clean water production, HCM City has seen a high proportion of lost water, at 34 percent on average, and sometimes 52 percent. Meanwhile, 20 percent of the dwellers of the city have to seek water themselves for use, especially big digging water wells and using the water from the wells directly, without any treatment.

According to the HCM City Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, there are about 200,000 wells created spontaneously by people and 1000 industrial wells which exploit 400,000 cubic meters of water per day. The massive exploitation of water has led to the increasing water pollution and the water decreases at underground water layers.

Infrastructure degrading

The HCM City authorities have been calling for investment in the infrastructure system to manage the water resources. The city’s water supply system was set up more than 100 years ago, while the Thu Duc water plant was built in 1963, which both have got too old.

Under the programming, the domestic waste water from residential quarters and urban areas would be

collected in 9 areas, where there are 9 concentrated waste water treatment plants using modern technologies.

However, to date, only the Binh Hung-Binh Chanh waste water treatment plant has been put into operation. Meanwhile, a lot of problems have arisen during the operation of the plant.

This means that the city would need huge financial resources to build and develop water supply and treatment systems.

Under the overall program on supplying water to HCM City approved by the Prime Minister, the water needed for people's daily life, services and industrial production is 1.7 million of cubic meter per day, not including the water for agricultural production.

The figure is expected to increase to 2.7 million cubic meters by 2015 and to 3.55 million by 2025

Plant found dumping untreated wastewater

The Hai Phong Thermoelectric Plant located in the northern port of Hai Phong City's Thuy Nguyen District was found to be releasing untreated wastewater and oil into Bach Dang River earlier this week, following a snap inspection.

According to the city's Environment Police, wastewater and oil were being dumped into the river via three pumps with a total capacity of up to 2,160 cubic metre per day.

Two water samples have been sent to authorities for analysis.

Company ordered to treat exhaust fumes

Dong Nai Province's People's Committee has instructed bakery and yeast producer AB Mauri Viet Nam to take urgent measures to prevent environmental pollution.

The company has been told to prepare a plan to treat exhaust fumes and submit it to the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment before November 10.

The agency also asked the company to install an exhaust fume treatment system and put it into operation before November 25.

The department has proposed the committee fine the company VND70 million (US\$3,330) for causing pollution.

Environment needs better protection

Enhanced environmental protection tools need to be applied in an effort to ease the nation's chronic pollution problem, according to experts at the workshop held by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in Ha Noi on Friday.

Tools such as the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and environmental impact assessment (EIA) would help planners assess the possible impacts on the environment of proposed projects before they were formally launched, and application of these tools would help minimise pollution stemming from economic development which had degraded the quality of life and threatened national security, said Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Nguyen Minh Quang.

The director of environmental impact assessment and evaluation for the ministry, Mai Thanh Dung, said that local authorities failed to pay enough attention to performing SEAs.

"The quality of local SEAs also remains low," Dung said.

SEAs were often on paper only and not based on real conditions in the particular locality, causing them to be ineffective as a tool in improving economic and environmental planning, he said.

EIAs were also performed without considering opinions by the local community, creating conflicts when projects were carried out, said Dang Kim Chi from the Viet Nam Association for Conservation of Nature and Environment.

"Many EIAs have been conducted without reference to environmental management but only in order for the projects to be approved," Chi said.

The low quality of EIAs could also be blamed on the low awareness of project investors or worse, namely their irresponsibility towards environment protection and the weak capacity of environmental evaluators, she said.

Nguyen Van Thanh from the Ministry of Industry and Trade agreed, adding that costs were another barrier to investors conducting proper SEAs or EIAs

To make these tools more effective, it was important to raise the awareness of both authorities and project investors about the essential role they play in preserving the environment, experts at the workshop agreed.

The capacity of environmental officials also needed to be enhanced to ensure the quality of assessments and of environmental management once projects were underway.

The application of these assessments was regulated by Decree No 29 issued last April and by Circular No 26 issued in July.

"Other regulations related to environment must also be amended to ensure consistency," said Dung, urging stricter provisions on punishing violators.

To date, 63 out of 61 provinces and cities throughout the country have conducted SEAs of their master socio-economic plans. However, shortcomings and limitations remain, with pollution on the rise, especially water pollution in urban and industrial zones.

According to Le Trinh from the Association of Environmental Impact Assessment, SEAs and EIAs have been effective environmental management tools worldwide since the 1980s, and Viet Nam was among the countries which applied these tools earliest in the Far East and Southeast Asian regions.

Farmers go green with waste-fuelled cooking stoves

Engineer Bui Trong Tuan, from Viet Tri City, first introduced his groundbreaking cooking stove, fuelled by agricultural waste, during the course of last year.

His invention has since helped reduce the energy burden on thousands of households.

Consisting of a barrel, a gas pipeline, fan and valves, the stove minimizes the loss of heat generated from waste burning and emits no smoke.

Tuan said that burning 2 kilos of straw, husks or dried leaves, could generate enough energy to last 3 hours.

The stove is capable of storing heat for days as long as both valves and fan are turned off, he explained.

The process involves waste smoldering in an oxygen restricted environment, releasing smoke containing nitrogen, carbon monoxide, hydrogen and methane. The gases are absorbed along the pipeline, eventually mixing with oxygen in the air to produce heat.

"Operating the stove is as simple as using a normal gas stove," Tuan noted, saying that around 3 kilos of waste could meet the daily energy demands of an average household.

Each stove cost around VND 2-3 million depending on the capacity of waste containers.

Tuan explained that he had cherished the idea to make the stove since he was a boy.

"I used to burn hay and straw to warm myself up when herding buffalo, discovering that the gases emitted were flammable."

In 2007, he decided to develop and promote his new stove. After many adjustments, he managed to finalise its design, selling around 1,000 last year.

The National Office of Intellectual Property, run by the Ministry of Science and Technology, has subsequently patented his product.

Tuan set up four workshops in Phu Tho, Hai Duong, Quang Binh and HCM City to expand production and tap into market demand.

"Improving the efficiency of the product and reducing its costs are currently my main targets," he said, adding that this year, he planned to produce over 4,000 stoves.

Businesses commit to combat climate change

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the German Embassy in Vietnam on Nov. 7 launched the Mekong Delta Business Forum to engage the business sector in initiatives to respond to climate change in the Mekong delta.

Speaking at the event, Henning Plate, Development Counselor of the German Embassy said climate change and its global impact are key topics for Germany's foreign policy, noting that due to the unique geography, Vietnam is among the countries most heavily affected by the consequences of climate change worldwide.

“By introducing and funding the forum, the German Embassy in Hanoi wants to encourage the private sector to take up a leading role in reducing the risks and costs of climate change,” Hunning Plate said.

The Mekong delta is one of the areas in the world most vulnerable to effects of climate change. According to Hoang Viet, WWF's project coordinator in Vietnam, rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion and an altered flow in the Mekong are having negative impacts on the livelihoods of 18 millions people living in the delta.

Thus, WWF calls on businesses to participate in the fight and encourages the private sector's involvement in building initiatives and methods to enhance climate resilience and sustainability in the Mekong delta.

Within the framework of the forum, there will be a series of educational activities such as a mangrove forest planting and field trips to ecological hot spots and climate change prone areas in the Mekong delta.

Businesses are also encouraged to take part in WWF's current initiatives for adapting to and mitigating climate change such as, Earth Hour, Green Office, Climate Savers, Climate Camp and the Mekong Delta Conservation Forum.

Experts warn Vietnam seriously lacks water

Vietnam has been officially added into the list of the nationals that face the water shortage. Chaotic exploitation leads to water shortage.

According to Dr Ngo Dinh Tuan, Chair of the Scientific Council of the Institute for Water Resources and Environment in East Asia, the average surface water per capita in Vietnam in 2010 was 3850 cubic meter per annum.

The figure puts Vietnam into the list of the countries that face a water shortage which comprises of the countries with the average surface water per capita is 4000 cubic meter or less, in accordance with the standards of the International Water Resources Association IWRA.

According to Dr Bui Cong Quang from the Water Resources University, if referring to the above said standard, with the current population and development level, the Dong Nai river basin and the basins of the rivers in the east of the southern region are facing occasional water shortage, while the Red River, Ma and Con Rivers in the north are nearly approaching the level.

The chaotic exploitation of water has been blamed on the water shortage. Experts say the overexploitation has gone beyond the withstanding of the ecological system.

Do Hong Phan, Chief Advisor of the Vietnam Water Network, said that most of the river basin committees, which have been established in the country, have not played any role in the coordination and control of water exploitation.

Two committees, the Environment Protection Committee of Dong Nai River Basin Planning and the Management Board of Dong Nai River Basin, both take the responsibility for Dong Nai River in the south. However, scientists say the two committees have been operating separately from each other. That explains why they keep different viewpoints on the treatment to Dong Nai 6 and Dong Nai 6A hydropower plant projects.

On most of the river valleys in the east of the southern region, more than 75 percent of water volume in the dry season is exploited. As for Ma River, the proportion is up to 80 percent. The proportions show that the water overexploitation has created the unsustainability to the valleys.

It is estimated that Vietnam consumes some 80.6 billion cubic meter of water a year for different purposes. The volume of water to be consumed by 2020 would increase by 48 percent, or 120 billion cubic meters.

Of this, the volume of water to be needed for watering would increase by 30 percent, while the water for aquaculture would increase by 90 percent. Especially, the water for urban areas and industrial production would increase sharply by 150 percent and 190 percent, respectively.

Scientists have warned that the water demand would increase significantly on the river valleys of Tra Khuc, Con, Ba, Se San, Sre Pok and the river valleys in the east of the southern region. Red alert for Dong Nai River valley.

Companies confront climate change

Representatives of about 40 companies participated in yesterday's launch of the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta Business Forum in HCM City.

The forum seeks action to promote sustainable development in the face of global warming and climate change challenges.

Initiated by WWF (World Wildlife Fund) Viet Nam and supported by the German Embassy in Viet Nam, the forum will initiate direct actions that respond to climate change adaptation needs in the delta.

Next week, up to 300 corporate staff are expected to join mangrove planting in Ben Tre Province. Mangrove forests on the coast provide protection from storms, floods and land erosion, help purify water and are an important habitat for aquatic species, said WWF Viet Nam representative Huynh Tien Dung.

On November 27 a climate camp will be organized in the city's botanical garden for corporate staff and students to raise awareness of climate change and discuss ways to protect the environment.

A trip to the delta will be organized for local and international journalists, scientists, government officials and corporate representatives to learn how communities are vulnerable to climate change as also how they can respond to it.

On December 12, businesses will join an event in HCM City to share knowledge and experiences in their own reactions to climate change.

They are also expected to announce their sustainable growth plans and other activities to support vulnerable communities in the delta.

Viet Nam is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change and resultant rise in sea levels.

The Mekong and Red River deltas face serious inundation, according to project manager Hoang Viet of WWF Viet Nam.

The Mekong River is one of the most biodiverse regions on earth with four out of 10 largest freshwater fish species living in the river.

Pollution shrinks villagers' lifespan by 10 years

Serious environmental pollution has shrunk the average lifespan of local inhabitants in many trade villages and economic zones by 10 years compared with the country's overall life expectancy, the National Assembly's Standing Committee has warned at its meeting yesterday.

The Committee released the warning in its report on environmental compliance with state regulations at trade villages and economic zones. At the meeting, many deputies voiced their deep concern about the pollution problems in these places.

At present, Vietnam has more than 3,200 trade villages that employ over 11 million people, the NA's Committee for Science, Technology and Environment said.

The levels of pollutants measured in villages engaged in food processing, breeding and animal slaughtering have exceeded the country's allowable limits by dozens of times, the committee said. In some villages, the contents of biological oxygen demand (BOD) and the chemical oxygen demand (COD) in wastewater were 200 times higher than the acceptable levels, it said.

In villages engaged in metal processing, the levels of harmful heavy metals, mercury salt, cyanide, discharged oil, and other harmful substances have been 1.5 to 10 times higher than the safety limits allowed.

Some villages set up a waste treatment system but did not operate it, citing high costs as the main reason. In 15 coastal economic zones that were inspected, the pollution from organic substances and from oil and grease were 1-2 times and 4-6 times greater than the limits established by the authorities, respectively.

Many of them discharged untreated or poorly treated wastewater into the environment. Many zones operated their waste treatment facilities only when they received inspectors. Since the administrative penalty rates are far lower than the cost of investment in waste treatment systems or that of cleaning up the pollution, many zones prefer to pay fines rather than complying with the regulations. "If the situation is not improved, the pollution will only get worse, and when it reaches a certain extent, the task of environmental restoration will be very hard and costly," the committee said.

Violation must be strictly dealt with. Many deputies blamed the existing pollution at trade villages and economic zones on the lack of responsibility of relevant agencies in inspecting and handling environmental violations.

"Many instances were reported by the public and media of serious pollution problems caused by some businesses, leading to the mass death of fish or crops, but after conducting investigations, relevant authorities announced the pollution level to be within the allowable limits," said deputy Nguyen Anh Son from Nam Dinh Province.

Thua Thien-Hue has punished many polluting trade villages while in Hanoi, the authorities have for a long time failed to handle the pollution caused by Duong Lieu trade village.

Nguyen Van Tien, deputy chairman of the NA's Social Affairs Committee, said laws and regulations are applicable to all localities, but their enforcement varies from place to place, resulting in different outcomes.

Another deputy, Nguyen Minh Lam from Long An Province requested relevant agencies "to immediately suspend any economic entities that intentionally commit environmental violations."

“Industrial parks (IP) or economic zones are allowed to operate only when they meet the requirements on waste treatment,” he said.

Le Minh Thong, deputy chairman of the NA’s Law Committee, said all companies in IPs or economic zones must meet technological requirements. If they cause pollution problems, their names should be publicized and their products be boycotted.

Le Phuoc Thanh, chairman of the Quang Nam Province People’s Committee, proposed the NA increase the budget for environment protection from the current 1 percent to 2 percent of the total budget revenue. “To invest in the environment today is to take care of the health tomorrow,” he said.

Four polluting factories shut in HCM City

Four polluting factories in HCM City were forced to suspend operations by having their power supply cut and their machinery and equipment sealed, the municipal Department of Natural Resources and Environment has announced.



The four firms are: a cloth dyeing workshop in District 12's Dong Hung Thuan Ward; Gia Hung Co Ltd in District 12's Tan Thoi Nhat Ward; paper producer Hoang Son Phat Co Ltd in Le Minh Xuan Industrial Park, Binh Chanh District; and Quoc Sieu Co Ltd in Binh Chanh District's Vinh Loc B Commune.

These factories had been fined earlier for violating environmental protection regulations. However, recent inspections showed that the gas emissions from these factories remain higher than permitted.

This is the first time this "strong" measure has been taken to force polluting enterprises to suspend their operations, the inspectors said.

Meanwhile, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment in central Thua Thien - Hue Province has fined 11 polluting enterprises over VND2 billion (USD95,200) for violating local environmental protection regulations.

Last week, Phan Van Dang, Chief Inspector of the Department, named the firms as violators: Thua Thien - Hue Enameled Tiles Co No 1; Hue Paper Material Joint Venture Co; Hue Textile and Garment JSC; Hue Seafood JSC; Kuks - Viet Nam Cement Co Ltd; Hoang Gia Paint Co Ltd; Thua Thien - Hue Mineral and Enameled Tile Co; Hue Brewery; Thuy Phuong Waste Treatment Co; Hue Environment and Urban Work Co; and Binh Dien Hydro-power Plant.

Their violations included the lack of wastewater and gas emission treatment facilities and the discharging of wastewater and gas in greater volumes than permitted, Dang said.

WB special envoy on climate change visits VN

The World Bank's Special Envoy on climate change Andrew Steer is on a visit to Vietnam to assess impacts of climate change on the Southeast Asian country.

In his meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai in Hanoi on Nov. 10, Steer discussed the WB plan for member countries' activities to respond to climate change and proposals on the institution's assistance to Vietnam from funds set up by the WB and co-donors.

Deputy PM Hai spoke highly of the WB's recent achievements, saying that the institution plays an especially important role in achieving sustainable poverty reduction in developing countries and promoting global trade, particularly food security, renewable energy development and environmental protection.

He hailed the strong support from Steer in his earlier capacity as WB resident director in Vietnam , from 1997-2002.

The Deputy PM expressed his wish that the WB will continue to help Vietnam to seek aid sources and technical assistance, since Vietnam is among countries most at risk from climate change and sea level rise.

Hai took this opportunity to thank the WB for its provision of a loan worth 70 million USD to the programme on climate change (Phase I).

He said he wanted the WB to consider soft loans to projects relating to coastal protective forests, construction of a tidal dyke system and enhancement of flood control in vulnerable urban cities and central provinces.

Mekong to develop flood-proof housing

Deputy Minister of Construction Nguyen Tran Nam yesterday asked Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta provinces to speed up work on construction of housing foundations, dykes and infrastructure for flood-proof residential clusters.

Reviewing the results of a national programme on building flood-proof residential clusters in the Delta, Nam said residents living in the clusters had been protected from rising floodwaters in the Delta in the past 10 years.

Nam said the construction of clusters in low-lying areas should be completed on schedule so the people in affected areas could relocate in 2013, as scheduled in the second phase of the programme.

However, the process of building flood-proof residential clusters in provinces under the second phase has been slow, while the provincial authorities said it was due to a capital shortage.

Under the second phase (2008-13), the programme intends to build 178 flood-proof residential clusters with total investment of more than VND3.283 trillion (US\$ 157.8 million). At least VND1.398 trillion (\$67.2 million) from the central and province budgets and VND1.885 trillion (\$90.6 million) from bank loans would be given.

However, capital allocation has been slow. There is a lack of VND582 billion (\$27.98 million) from the State budget and more than VND842 billion (\$40.48 million) from bank loans have not been implemented yet.

Furthermore, price volatility has led to an increase in the current investment capital, much higher than the earlier calculated capital, especially for site clearance and construction investment.

The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) has asked province to submit a periodic report on expenses and specific coming plans in order to ensure effective use of investment capital.

The MPI said the provinces should get capital for building dykes from the Government's Flood and Storm Preparedness and Prevention Fund and capital for infrastructure should be collected from businesses.

A representative of the Government Office said the Government would solve a capital shortage next year.

After the cluster completion, localities should manage and balance the local budget annually for maintenance.

Nam said localities should not increase expenses by decreasing the scale of cluster projects.

Attending were officials of the Ministry of Construction, and provincial authorities from An Giang, Kien Giang, Dong Thap, Can Tho, Vinh Long, Tien Giang, and Long An provinces.

Centre to promote climate technology

A climate innovation centre will be set up in Viet Nam to promote climate technology by offering venture finance and other support for small and medium enterprises.

As part of the centre design process, a workshop on barriers and solutions to climate technologies was held in Ha Noi yesterday, Nov 15. It was attended by 120 stakeholders in both public and private sectors.

The centre will be designed and launched by InfoDev, a global partnership of the World Bank Group and a multi-donor programme that supports innovation and technology entrepreneurship in developing countries.

The centre would arrive at an opportune time as many environmental companies were asking for more support and funding for their business initiatives, said Huynh Kim Tuoc, vice president of the Viet Nam Environmental Industry Business Association.

Tuoc said environmental technology enterprises in Viet Nam lacked access to consultation and assistance.

Nguyen Van Phung, deputy director of the Tax Policy Department under the Ministry of Finance, said the Government had allotted a very small amount, around 1-2 per cent of its budget, to developing technologies and promoting environmental innovation.

"Most of the money spent is only for research and studies," Phung said.

Government policies relating to climate technology innovation were not practical and consistent, which was likely to discourage enterprises from such initiatives.

Information from the workshop along with a business plan will be used to implement the centre.

Sitting on huge reserves of titanium, living together with pollution

Overexploitation, unreasonable investment and mismanagement on titanium mining areas all have caused big consequences to the environment in Binh Thuan province.

Thousands of the households living near the exploitation areas are living in a severely polluted environment and facing the risk of being destroyed by sandstorms. Meanwhile, tourism sites cannot attract travelers because of the polluted environment.

Living with fears. Tran Van Chau , a local resident of Tan Thanh commune in Ham Thuan Nam district of Binh Thuan province, said that he would never forget the fear he felt when the “sandstorm” rushed down in September.

“At 6 pm of September 9, when it was raining, a big volume of sand unexpectedly flow rushed down into our garden and flooded in our house. The sand came from the exploited mine on the dune,” he said. “Just after 10 minutes, the dragon fruit orchard with 2-meter poles became dazzlingly white because it was covered with sand. It was so lucky that the doors of the house were closed, therefore, only a small volume of sand flowed into the house,” he added.

The sand flooding in people’s house came from the project site of Duong Anh Joint Stock Company which got the license from the Binh Thuan provincial authorities to exploit titanium ores and collect sand on the area of 7.2 hectares.

According to Tran Van Bon, Secretary of the Tan Thanh Commune’s Party Committee, before kicking off the project, on May 5, 2011, the investor met local residents in Van Ke hamlet, promising not to cause the environment pollution during the exploitation process. However, in fact, local residents have been “living together with fears” since the project was kicked off.

Since the exploitation site is located on the dune higher by 30 meters than people’s houses, it is nearly impossible to prevent sand from spreading out, and just a small rain can make the sand flood in people’s houses.

Right after the “sandstorm”, the Binh Thuan provincial Department for Natural Resources and the Environment requested the company to stop the exploitation for 90 days and fix the problems. The provincial authorities also have decided to impose a fine of 93.5 million dong on Duong Anh Company.

The company then gave Chau 415 million VND in compensation for the damages to the dragon fruit orchard.

The sandstorm and the polluted water sources

Though the Duong Anh’s project has just been kicked off, it has caused big consequences to the lives of local residents. On October 19, all the 64 households living near the dune gathered a meeting, where they warned the company that if the company does not apply necessary measures to prevent the pollution, they would ask the local authorities to order to stop the implementation of the project.

The titanium overexploitation has brought about a lot of consequences to tourism sites, polluted the environment where thousands of households live. Meanwhile, experts have warned that they may face sandstorms at any time.

According to the Binh Thuan Department for Science and Technology, the radioactivity in the titanium exploitation areas has exceeded the allowed level. When it rains heavily, the sand on the dune flows to people’s houses.

Hong Chinh hamlet proves to be the biggest sufferer. Since it is located on the low position, the titanium exploitation at Thien Ai mine is gradually killing the living environment of the hamlet.

Especially, the water resource in the hamlet has become a salt-marsh area. It is because the exploiter uses the underground water for the exploitation and processing, which has made the water resource depleted.

Regarding the solutions to settle the environment pollution on Thien Ai mine area, Secretary of the Hoa Thang commune's party committee Truong Quang Tho said that two solutions have been suggested.

One of the two solutions is to install a water supply system for local residents in Hong Chinh hamlet.

Locals clamor for tougher action against polluter

Residents in a commune in Dong Nai Province demand the polluting company, AB Mauri Vietnam, be shut down if it continues causing pollution problems.

Residents in La Nga Commune, Dinh Quan District, Dong Nai Province have requested the local authority to shut down yeast producer AB Mauri Vietnam Co Ltd if it continues to cause pollution problems.

They made the demand at a meeting yesterday held by the district People's Committee and the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment to address pollution problems caused by the company.

The department said at the meeting that it had fined the company VND70 million (US\$3,330) for discharging semi-treated wastewater and exhaust fume which affected local resident's crops and fishing.

The company must take measures to stop the pollution before November 25 or it will be suspended, the department said.

Local authorities said the company had broken its promise in 2009 to comply with environmental regulations but many residents complained that the authorities had failed to handle the company's polluting activities properly.

The authorities should not allow the company to continue its operation before it resolves the consequences it has caused, locals said.

They said if the company fails to improve the situation and does not compensate local residents for the damage to their crops and fishing, it must be shut down permanently.

On October 30, 2011, some 100 angry residents gathered outside the company to complain about its discharge of poorly-treated wastewater and exhaust fumes.

It was their second such protest against the company. In July 2009 the people had agitated after the company released wastewater into the Tri An reservoir and caused such severe pollution that the provincial authorities closed it down for three months.

The company had then promised to cease operations if the pollution continued, but locals said the company did nothing to stop the pollution to the La Nga River, severely affecting their fishing activities.

Water from the river had a much higher content of iron than is allowed, and water samples taken from many wells in the area all failed to meet the country's safety standards, the provincial Preventive Health Center reported.

Two of the samples even contained arsenic, a carcinogen, it said.

City garbage-fee programme fails

Two years after the introduction of Government Decree 88, HCM City has not managed to meet its targeted amount of collection fees for environmental hygiene and protection.

The city collected only VND146 billion (US\$6.95 million) from waste-dischargers last year, while the requested total collection fee was more than VND277.3 billion (\$13.2 million), according to the city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

Last week, the department held a seminar in HCM City to review implementation of the decree.

District authorities in the city said the fee collection programme had failed because of the public's resistance to the decree, which assigned local People's Committees to manage fee collection.

Awareness of the need to be environmentally clean was low, especially among non-household groups.

In addition, private environmental hygiene companies have not been properly managed.

These companies reportedly have been paying lower fees than the amount requested to waste collectors, who were not using receipts issued by State-run tax agencies.

Only 15 State-owned environmental hygiene co-operatives in HCM City are in charge of fee collection, according to Huynh Kim Hoan, vice president of the HCM City Co-operatives Union.

In many localities where there is no co-operative of such kind, private environmental hygiene companies take charge of fee collection.

District authorities have asked the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to have stricter management of privately owned waste collectors, especially those not belonging to any group.

They have also proposed further promotional activities to raise awareness of responsibility among waste dischargers, especially non-household companies.

Districts in HCM City have not applied penalties outlined in Circular 06 issued by the Ministry of Finance in 2004, which is a guiding document to implement Government Decree 106, issued a year before, on administrative discipline related to environmental hygiene fee collection.

State-owned waste collectors have asked the city to strictly manage and penalise companies that violate regulations.

Currently, there is a debate on whether to raise waste-collection fees, particularly during a time of higher cost-of-living and rising inflation.

Some city districts, including Binh Tan, Hoc Mon and Thu Duc, have asked to increase the fee while other participants at the seminar disagreed.

The vice director of the city's Urban Environmental Hygiene Company, Nguyen Minh Hoang, said a fee increase was unnecessary, and that it was more important to educate the public about fee payments and manage fee collection more effectively.

A fee increase would only make fee collections more difficult, he added. Participants at the seminar said that the departments of Natural Resources and Environment and Finance should work out flexible fee levels based on companies' production activities.

According to their suggestion, companies discharging less waste would pay lower fees.

They proposed that households located in alleys each pay VND15, 000 (75 cents) per month, and those located on main roads VND20, 000 (nearly \$1) per month.

As part of their plan, localities would spend 5-10 per cent of total collected fees to pay collectors and 20-25 per cent would be contributed to the city's budget.

New conditions for medical waste

A draft master plan on medical waste management seeks to impose new conditions and limits on storage and treatment on hospitals and other healthcare facilities in HCM City.

Prepared by the city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment, the plan classifies medical solid waste into five categories: infectious and pathological waste; hazardous chemical waste, radioactive waste, pressurised containers, and general waste.

Infectious and pathological waste are to be treated by incineration and chemical hazardous waste recycled after hazardous substances are extracted from it.

Pressurized containers like cylinders are to be recycled and reused.

The plan seeks to ensure that hazardous waste is not mixed with general waste and that waste collecting bags are made of polyethylene and polypropylene.

Hospitals will not be allowed to store solid waste for more than 48 hours, and they will have to arrange to move infectious waste to quarantined facilities within 72 hours.

It will be mandatory for healthcare facilities to sign contracts for transportation and treatment of their medical waste with companies licensed by city authorities.

In a meeting held last month to collect opinions, representatives of waste treatment companies suggested that the city urgently sets up safe solid waste landfills where ash from burning hazardous waste can be buried to avoid the diffusion of toxic substances in the environment.

The department estimates that 13.57 tonnes of medical solid waste are generated by healthcare facilities in the city each day, and this is set to increase to more than 80 tonnes per day in 2025.

Companies producing health food supplements discharge nearly 1,000 tonnes of solid waste per year.

The plan seeks to address several problems that have plagued medical solid waste management in the city, including the sale of untreated medical waste like used syringes.

Huynh Minh Nhut, head of the HCM City Environmental Company, said more than 7,000 health clinics have not signed contracts with companies that specialise in medical solid waste treatment.

The draft planning of environment protection of the Nhue – Day river basin in 2015 and orientations to 2020

In the morning of November 24, the Department of Waste Management and Environment Improvement of the Vietnam Environment Administration (VEA) held a consultation workshop on the draft planning of environment protection of the Nhue - Day river basin in 2015 and orientations to 2020.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bui Cach Tuyen, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) and General Director of VEA attended and chaired the workshop.

The objective of the draft plan is to ensure the exploitation and rational use of natural resources of the Nhue - Day river basin, firstly is the water resources to meet the needs of economic - society development without causing pollution or degradation of environmental quality.

The specific objectives of the draft planning are including the integrated assessment of the status and trend forecast of the natural environment and ecology changes due to the natural and socio-economic conditions of the Nhue – Day river basin in 2015 and 2020; accurately identify the difficulties and challenges in managing natural resources and environment of the Nhue – Day river basin; develop the environmental protection planning in 2015 and orientations to 2020; suggest environmental protection improvements and management to contribute to the sustainable development of the Nhue – Day river basin.

Participants commented on the proposed evaluation criteria and the type of industrial environment pollution of the Nhue – Day river basin for the development of the Government Decree on regulations of production and business types that are risks of environmental pollution and in need to investment prohibit or limitation in the Cau, Nhue - Day and Dong Nai river basins.

The rate of industrialization and urbanization and a rapidly increasing population currently in Vietnam that led to the diversification of production is causing increasingly severe pressure on water resources in the region.

The water environment in many urban, industrial zones and craft villages increasingly polluted by wastewater, waste gas and solid waste from large cities and industrial facilities.

The development of criteria for determining the type of production should prohibit or restrict of the river basin is an important component in the management of river basins and always closely associated with the management of all activities related to the usage of water and water-related factors on the watershed.

Therefore, the purpose of this activity is to limit the level of pollution, overcome depression and improve water quality of river basins; exploitation and rational use of natural resources; and raising awareness and responsibility of the community at the same time.

Participants suggested that one cause of pollution of river basins is due to rapid urbanization, domestic wastewater from urban areas discharge directly to the river basins, therefore, management agencies need to focus on wastewater treatment.

The participants also suggested that the environmental plan of the Nhue – Day river basin should be consistent with the land, social and economic planning of the local river basin, and should specify steps in planning to ensure the success of the planning.

Coast management to be integrated

Integrated management of coastal areas would help conserve and sustainably use marine and coastal bio-diversity and better cope with climate change, especially in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta, a seminar in HCM City heard yesterday.

More than 100 experts from Viet Nam, the Philippines, Germany, Laos, and Bangladesh, policy makers from the Mekong Delta, and representatives of NGOs and donors gathered yesterday for the "Integrated Coastal Area Management (ICAM)" seminar.

It sought to share knowledge about the ICAM concept, enable delegates to compare notes, and create a common understanding about ICAM in Viet Nam, especially the delta region.

ICAM refers to co-management of coastal areas where two or more social entities negotiate, define, and guarantee among themselves a fair sharing of management functions, benefits, mandates, and responsibilities.

It is considered to help effectively manage and protect mangrove forests, enabling protection from tides, erosion, storms, and floods.

It also helps improve livelihoods through sustainable use of resources.

Nguyen Chu Hoi of the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment said the sustainable development of coasts must be based on ICAM to maintain their natural functions and the connectivity of the coastal systems and marine eco-systems.

Only this would ensure sustainable economic development, improvement in local communities' livelihoods, and mitigate coastal hazard, he said.

Prof Tim Smith from Australia's University of the Sunshine Coast, director of its Sustainability Research Centre, said approaches to coastal management were continuing to evolve rapidly.

But climate change would exacerbate existing coastal management challenges, so institutions for ICAM needed to be not only adaptive but also mainstreamed, he said.

Bianca Schlegel, technical advisor to the Management of Natural Resources in the Coastal Zone of Soc Trang Province project, said sustainable ICAM would require factoring in of future scenarios in planning.

These included participation of many stakeholders in decision-making, dealing with uncertainties, consideration of complex processes and interactions, and inter-disciplinary and cross-border consensus, she said.

ICAM, in contrast to a traditional sectoral approach to management, is a holistic, cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary approach in which land and sea areas on coasts are managed as an integrated unit.

The approach, which aims to balance environmental, economic, social, cultural, and recreational objectives, is widely considered the most effective tool for conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal bio-diversity.

Viet Nam coastal areas are threatened by some of the most challenging impacts of climate change like rising sea levels, intensifying storm surges, flooding, and drought.

Poor communities dependent on natural resources, coastal fisheries, and low-lying agricultural lands for their livelihood would be hit hardest by them.

Waste removal workers face multiple serious health risks

Waste pickers and recyclers in the informal sector are at risk of contracting and transmitting several diseases that can be deemed occupational hazards, according to initial results of a survey released yesterday.

The survey, carried out by the Southern Institute of Sustainable Development, polled 246 informal waste pickers and 54 recyclers in seven districts – 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, Binh Thanh and Go Vap – in HCM City.

More than 82 per cent of the respondents had no access to health insurance, with most saying they could not afford either voluntary or mandatory (where the State pays part of the premium) healthcare schemes.

However, among those who did have some form of health insurance, most participated in voluntary health insurance schemes, the survey found.

The most common diseases afflicting informal waste pickers and recyclers are dengue fever, influenza, skin diseases, lung diseases, bronchitis, pneumonia, backache and diarrhea.

When the diseases occurred, most of them bought medicines at drug stores without prescriptions and did not bother to seek treatment at hospitals, the survey found.

More than 66.4 per cent of 146 informal rag pickers contracting dengue fever said they did not attend treatment at hospitals.

This was also true of around 60 per cent of 88 workers who suffered various skin diseases.

Since the informal waste pickers and recyclers worked at least eight hours a day, seven days a week, they were at higher than normal risks of contracting contagious diseases.

The survey was part of a project being implemented between 2011 and 2013 by the international non-government organisation Environment and Development in Action (Enda).

The project, with a total cost of 1.26 million euros (US\$1.7 million) funded by the European Commission, aims to improve working conditions of informal waste pickers and recyclers as well as reducing health risk factors in Madagascar, Ethiopia, Colombia and Viet Nam.

It also helps to improve the access to health insurance and other social services.

In Viet Nam, the project, which has funding of more than 176,800 euros, is being implemented by Enda Viet Nam in collaboration with the HCM City Labour Federation.

It will benefit 2,500-3,500 individual waste pickers and recyclers and an estimated total of 10,000-14,000 in the seven targeted districts.

Floods ravage central region for second time in November

Floods, triggered by torrential rain, have ravaged the central region over the weekend, with a countless number of houses and rice crops inundated or destroyed.

According to a report from the Central Steering Committee for Storm and Flood Control, average rainfall on Friday and Saturday in central coastal provinces from Thua Thien Hue to Binh Dinh was between 50-100mm.

Heavy rains, of 200-600mm were reported in some areas, including Nam Dong District in Thua Thien Hue, Da Nang City, Tam Ky, Tra My districts in Quang Nam and Ba To in Quang Ngai.

Floods on some local rivers reached their high warning level, but started to recede from Saturday afternoon, the committee said.

Rising water submerged almost 3,400 houses in the provinces of Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh, damaged 450ha of rice and subsidiary crops and a lot of irrigation works as well as transport routes.

Flood also swept away a 10-year-old boy from Tay Tra District in Quang Ngai. More than 280 households in Mo Duc District were moved to higher ground.

Financial losses have yet to be calculated, but some districts in Binh Dinh estimated they would amount to between VND3 billion (US\$144,000) and VND12 billion (\$571,000) in their localities.

Some provinces in the same region are still recovering from floods that struck earlier this month, when 20 lives were lost.

Last week, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung earmarked VND135 billion (\$6.4 million) from the State budget and 3,600 tonnes of rice from the national reserve to support flood-hit areas.

Flood tide in HCM City

Flood tides in the Sai Gon River, which broke a 50-year record in HCM City just a month ago, flowed even higher on Friday.

The Phu An station recorded 1.6m, or 0.03m higher than the old mark set on October 29.

When the level topped 1.55m on Friday, water spilled over the dyke in Districts 2, 12, and Thu Duc, flooding some residential areas.

Low-lying areas along the river and canals were inundated, with roads being submerged and traffic becoming chaotic. Luong Dinh Cua Road in District 2 was the worst hit with the water reaching 0.7m, completely blocking traffic.

Twelve areas in the city were severely flooded on Friday, according to the city's anti-flooding programme management centre.

The HCM City Steering Committee for Flood and Storm Control has ordered local authorities to beef up surveillance of the dyke and canal systems.

The committee has also ordered the Dau Tieng Reservoir management board to closely monitor the flood gates to minimise damage in the city's downstream areas.

One of the main objectives of Dau Tieng, situated 70km from HCM City, is preventing floods in downstream Sai Gon.