

Press Review 01/2012 - Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology,

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1	Medical waste backs up	4/1/2012	VN News	HCM	Waste	With treatment of medical waste being highly capital-intensive, only around 70 per cent of it is treated in hospitals around the country.
2	Tap water prices to increase 10%	4/1/2012	VN News	HCM	Water	The prices of tap water in HCM City have been raised by 10 per cent with the city administration saying it plans to raise people's awareness of efficient water use and upgrade water supply facilities.
3	HCM City to eliminate 10 flood spots	5/1/2012	Vfej	HCM	Environment	The HCM City administration is determined to stop flooding at 10 of 31 spots in the city by the end of the year.
4	Growing threat to biodiversity	9/1/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Biodiversity and the natural environment in central Viet Nam are being increasingly degraded due to economic development, according to a recent study by the Viet Nam Environment Administration's Biodiversity Conservation Department.
5	German expert gives lessons in biodiversity	11/1/2012	VN News	Danang	Environment	Central Da Nang City's Sciences and Technology Department, in collaboration with German naturalist Ulrike Streicher, organised a photo exhibition on Monday featuring the biodiversity of Son Tra Natural Reserve.



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6	VN knuckles down on climate-change	12/1/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Climate Change	Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung yesterday chaired the first working session of the National Committee on Climate Change, two days after its official establishment.
7	Further support pledged for rural water supply programme	13/1/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Water & Sanitation	Three donors - Denmark, the UK and Australia - signed a joint agreement yesterday, committing US\$93 million to support Viet Nam's National Target Programme for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 3 in the next four years.
8	Pollution threatens Gulf of Tonkin	16/1/2012	VN News	Tonkin	Pollution	Viet Nam's coastal region of West Bac Bo (Tonkin) Gulf, adjacent to China and other Asian countries, suffers from trans-boundary environmental pollution and joint efforts are being urged to tackle this problem.
9	Sustainable goals set for coal mining	30/1/2012	VN News	Northern Vietnam	Environment	The coal mining industry has set a target of pairing its activities with environmental protection while ensuring national energy security for socio-economic development.



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Medical waste backs up

With treatment of medical waste being highly capital-intensive, only around 70 per cent of it is treated in hospitals around the country.

The health sector's need to treat its waste between 2009 and 2015 is nearly VND5 trillion (US\$238 million), but most hospitals in the country, especially major ones, are State-run and cannot afford investment on this scale for waste treatment.

This poses a serious threat of diseases spreading.

Consider the numbers: There are more than 1,180 hospitals with 187,840 beds discharging around 380 tonnes of solid waste, including 40 tonnes of hazardous waste, and 150,000cu.m of wastewater every single day.

According to Nguyen Huy Nga, head of the ministry's Department of Health Environment Management, the 200 incinerators in the country, of which the advanced ones are mostly in central hospitals, dispose of only 70 per cent of medical waste.

In fact, only 50 per cent of the hospitals classify their medical wastes.

The volumes are expected to double by 2020 to 800 tonnes of solid waste and 300,000cu.m of wastewater.

Nga has said waste treatment is quite expensive at around VND80,000 (\$3.8) per kilogramme while on the other hand not many hospitals individually generate enough waste to justify setting up an incinerator.

In Dong Nai, for instance, the shortage of funds has badly affected medical-waste treatment. The southern province's hospitals and medical centres discharge around 7.7 tonnes of waste a day, including two tonnes of hazardous waste, but their collection is sloppy and wastewater treatment falls short of requirement.

Khanh Hoa has just one treatment centre to dispose of medical waste generated by 21 hospitals all over the central province. Recently it shut down for a week after running out of money to buy materials.

In an effort to combat the problem, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment decided earlier this year to earmark 1 per cent of its environmental protection budget to help the Ministry of Health upgrade waste-treatment systems in all public hospitals.

To improve medical-waste treatment, many legal and other documents have been issued recently, including a master plan for treatment in the 2011-15 period that has been approved by the Government.

Since it is a pressing issue, the Ministry of Health has asked for an increase in investment in many approved healthcare projects for setting up wastewater treatment facilities.

The ministry is also using a \$155 million loan from the World Bank for a six-year project to build and upgrade wastewater treatment systems at five major public hospitals and a number of other leading ones in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta.



A worker burns medical waste at a hospital in the north central province of Ninh Binh. The shortage of funds has badly affected hospital waste treatment in the country.

Tap water prices to increase 10%

The prices of tap water in HCM City have been raised by 10 per cent with the city administration saying it plans to raise people's awareness of efficient water use and upgrade water supply facilities.

The new prices, ranging from VND4,800 (US\$0.2) to VND15,200 (\$0.7) per cubic metre for different payers, took effect on Sunday, January 1, according to the Sai Gon Water Corporation (SAWACO).

The price adjustment is part of the city's 2010-13 water pricing plan formulated under a decision made by the municipal administration in 2009. The first increase in prices under the plan was applied in March 2010.

The new prices are at least VND400 higher than last year, when they ranged from VND4,400 to VND13,500.

The price increase is necessary, according to SAWACO, because the water suppliers need to generate capital to invest in upgrading their facilities and minimise the loss of water. The increase also aims to encourage people to use water more efficiently.

The minimum increase in prices applies to households and the maximum to businesses and service providers.

Next year, tap water prices will rise further by VND500-1,700. By then households will be paying at least VND5,300 per cu.m and businesses and service providers will pay VND16,900 per cu.m.

HCM City to eliminate 10 flood spots

The HCM City administration is determined to stop flooding at 10 of 31 spots in the city by the end of the year.

Speaking at a meeting on Tuesday, Nguyen Huu Tin, deputy chairman of the People's Committee, said the Steering Centre for Anti-flooding Programme should eliminate the other 21 spots by 2015 and prevent new ones.

The 10 spots are located on An Duong Vuong and Hau Giang streets in District 6, Phan Anh Street in Binh Tan, Lanh Binh Thang Street in District 11, Ung Van Khiem and Vu Tung streets in Binh Thanh, National Highway No. 1A in District 12, Quang Trung Street in Go Vap, Go Dua Street in Thu Duc, and Do Xuan Hop in District 9.

Their elimination would reduce flooding in the city significantly and the resultant losses caused to residents and damage to infrastructure, the centre said.

To stop the flooding in the 10 spots, the centre has submitted to the People's Committee several proposals for draining the water.

For example, to eliminate the flooding in An Duong Vuong Street between Tan Hoa Dong and Ba Hom streets, the centre will build two water drainage systems, one from Ly Chieu Hoang Street to My Thuan Bridge and the other from Ba Hom Street to Mui Tau.

Nguyen Huu Thao, the centre's director, urged the People's Committee to approve the projects and allocate enough funds for these projects so that they can be implemented on schedule.

But he admitted that the task of preventing the reoccurrence of flooding at spots that had been cleared and the mushrooming of new spots was difficult, especially because of encroachment of canals, irrigation works, and drainage systems by residents.

Tin called on relevant departments and agencies to hasten the process of studying, approving, selecting construction sites, and issuing licenses for the anti-flooding works.

He also urged them to put a stop to the filling up of canals for building infrastructure and housing.

The heads of district people's committees had to be held responsible for encroachments of water bodies and dumping of rubbish into canals in their localities, he said.

Last year the city cleared 39 out of 70 flooding spots through several measures, including putting into use more than 200km of sewers and dredging 92 canals and sluices.



Nhieu Loc - Thi Nghe canal was dredged by the HCM City Steering Centre for Anti-flooding Programme last November. Last year the city cleared 39 out of 70 flooding spots through several measures, including dredging 92 canals and sluices.

Growing threat to biodiversity

Biodiversity and the natural environment in central Viet Nam are being increasingly degraded due to economic development, according to a recent study by the Viet Nam Environment Administration's Biodiversity Conservation Department.

The study, part of the Greater Mekong Sub-region Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative, reviewed the impacts of macro-economic development on forests and biodiversity in three central provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue.

Serious environmental degradation during the past 50 years has been blamed largely on the development of dams and hydro-power stations, mining and illegal logging and hunting.

There are 86 hydro-power plants with total capacity of nearly 2,000MW in the three provinces, noted the study, adding that each new plant takes up valuable land, not only for space to build dam reservoirs but also to resettle people displaced by the power plants.

This demand for land for power projects has put added pressure on forests in the area, which have already long suffered from illegal logging.

Forest loss due to illegal logging and fires are still at high levels in all three provinces, according to the study, with a total of 3,700 hectares of forest lost during the past decade.

Hunting was identified as the most significant threat to biodiversity at local nature reserves.

Circumstantial evidence indicates that hunting has intensified in recent years, partly due to easier access to the area following the construction of the Ho Chi Minh Highway but also due to a nationwide trend which has seen the expansion of the illegal wildlife trading network.

Deputy Director of the Viet Nam Environment Administration Nguyen The Dong said only a large-scale effort aimed at striking a balance between social, economic and environmental needs across the entire land could secure the area's natural wealth for the future.

James Peters, Chief Technical Advisor at the Greater Mekong Sub-region Environmental Operations Centre of Asian Development Bank, said that to address the drivers and pressures of changes, there was a need to streamline strategic planning processes and facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue as well as identify sustainable and low impact/high benefit development options.

This should begin with establishing green economic accounting systems and harmonising provincial land-use plans and tenure systems, said Peters.

German expert gives lessons in biodiversity

Central Da Nang City's Sciences and Technology Department, in collaboration with German naturalist Ulrike Streicher, organised a photo exhibition on Monday featuring the biodiversity of Son Tra Natural Reserve.

The travelling exhibit will be held in seven schools from now to the middle of March to raise awareness about environmental protection among students.

Department director Huynh Phuoc said that the natural reserve was home to 985 species of plants, 36 animal species, 106 bird species, 23 species of reptiles and 113 species of insects.

VN knuckles down on climate-change

Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung yesterday chaired the first working session of the National Committee on Climate Change, two days after its official establishment.

Dung said response to climate change and sea level rise was a matter of life or death to the nation's sustainable development, and that Viet Nam had to start taking drastic measures right away or it would be too late.

He said it was not until now that Viet Nam realised the vital importance of responding to climate change. Since 2008, Viet Nam has constructed a National Target Programme to respond to climate change.

However, the efficiency has been low due to limited resources and weak co-operation between relevant stakeholders.

The National Committee on Climate Change hopes to help address this.

One of the committee's tasks is to advise and consult the Government and Prime Minister on important matters relating to inter-agency responsibilities with respect to climate change.

Its key functions include to design national climate change strategies and programmes, as well as monitor and co-ordinate the implementation of these strategies.

Dung asked the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to quickly finalise the principles governing its work and its working agenda.

He also pushed the ministry to finish compiling the National Action Plan to respond to climate change, make it available to the public and put it into practice.

The draft identified top priorities for the decade: climate change adaptation, increasing preparedness for natural calamities and sea level rise, ensuring food and water security and consolidating dyke embankment.

In order to fulfill these goals, Viet Nam should improve the management capacity of work related to climate change and mobilise resources from different actors in the economy.

Scientific research in support of national climate change policy and the strengthening of international co-operation were to be undertaken.

The action plan was scheduled to be submitted to the Prime Minister during this quarter.

As part of the Support Programme in response to the climate change, the inter-sectoral committee and independent consultants reviewed nearly 240 climate change proposals submitted by local authorities and selected 19 projects that touched on urgent matters.

Further support pledged for rural water supply programme

Three donors - Denmark, the UK and Australia - signed a joint agreement yesterday, committing US\$93 million to support Viet Nam's National Target Programme for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 3 in the next four years.

The programme, approved by the Vietnamese Government in 1998, has made contributions to the implementation of the National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy during 2000-20 and towards the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals in this field.



A clean water system has been constructed in Son Bua Commune, on the mountainous outskirts of Ha Noi. The country plans to provide access to clean water for 85 per cent of the rural population in the next four years.

So far, it has provided access to clean water for 75 per cent of the rural population, with 51 per cent of rural households having hygienic latrines.

In phase 3, the country targets to raise the percentage to 85 per cent and 65 per cent respectively. Moreover, most rural schools, kindergartens, and health clinics will have hygienic water and hygienic latrines.

The further support demonstrated the donors' strong determination and long term commitment to improve the livelihoods of rural poor in the country through provision of clean water and sanitation services, said AusAID's Mekong and Regional Minister-Counsellor Michael Wilson.

In the last phase, the three donors plus the Netherlands funded \$142 million to support the programme.

Pollution threatens Gulf of Tonkin

Viet Nam's coastal region of West Bac Bo (Tonkin) Gulf, adjacent to China and other Asian countries, suffers from trans-boundary environmental pollution and joint efforts are being urged to tackle this problem.

Researcher Luu Van Dieu, from the Institute of Marine Environment and Resources, said cross-border rivers including the Red, Ma and Ca rivers were major sources of pollutants poured into the gulf.

According to a country report by United Nations Environment Programme, Viet Nam's marine pollution issue dates back to 2004. Every year since then, the Red River alone brings to the gulf 232,000 tonnes of biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), 353,000 tonnes of chemical oxygen demand (COD), 31,000 tonnes of nitrogen, over 7,000 tonnes of phosphate, over 4,000 tonnes of heavy metals, 210 tonnes of fertiliser and about 13,000 tonnes of oil.

BOD and COD are two different ways of measuring how much oxygen will be depleted from the water. In both cases the oxygen-consuming substances are mainly of organic origin.

Waste from the river made up 95 per cent of the total pollutants discharged from this part of territory where the river runs through, the report said.

Dieu said that the stream flowing into the gulf led the transboundary pollution not just in the countries adjacent to the gulf and offshore area. There was also evidence of oil spills, marine waste and pollutants.

It is reported that in the last 25 years, about 140 oil spills occurred in the western region of the gulf. In late January and early February of 2007, oil spills were seen in coastal areas of the central provinces Ha Tinh and Quang Binh before spreading to the south. The accumulative collected oil was more than 1,700 tonnes.

"Up to 77 per cent of oil spills in Viet Nam's waters have yet to be dealt with, or properly compensated," Dieu said, adding that it was due to poor management and insufficient legal framework.

Raised awareness and capacity to manage trans-boundary pollution were necessary, he said.

Domestic and international co-operation among countries and organisations could help minimise the impact of transboundary pollution, he emphasised.

Dr Dinh Van Huy from the institute also said that so far, there were few insightful studies completed on this issue.

Investing in observation and assessing the current situation were necessary first steps, he said, adding that the institute submitted a proposal for requesting funding further research.

More observation stations should be set up along coastal lines and along the upper parts of rivers, facilitating a proper data base for assessment of the current situation and forecast changes in the coastal areas.

Sustainable goals set for coal mining

The coal mining industry has set a target of pairing its activities with environmental protection while ensuring national energy security for socio-economic development.

The target was raised in the Coal Industry Development Plan to 2020 with a vision to 2030 which was recently approved by the Prime Minister.

Under the plan, all coal mining areas throughout the country to 2020 would meet environmental protection standards in an effort to preserve the surrounding ecology.

The volume of annual coal exploitation was also expected to increase year by year.

This year's yield target is 47 million tonnes and is expected to increase by 40 per cent in 2020 and by 60 per cent in 2030. A large proportion of the yield will be used to generate electricity.

Under the plan, a geological survey of the two biggest coal basins in the north-eastern region, including Quang Ninh, Bac Giang and Hai Duong provinces and in the Hong (Red) River Delta, which includes Thai Binh, Hung Yen and Nam Dinh provinces, will be enhanced to explore potential coal mines.

The industry also targeted a gradual reduction in coal exports while also seeking import sources to ensure the country is well-prepared for its long-term energy security.

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, in order to achieve the goals, the industry needed more than VND690.9 trillion (US\$32.9 billion) for development of the industry to 2030.

The investment would cover mine and road upgrades and installations as well as road, railway and conveyer belt systems to serve coal exploitation activities.

Viet Nam's total coal reserve is estimated to be 48.7 billion tonnes, about 15 per cent of which is targeted for exploitation by 2030. More than 130 coal mines are expected to be operational during the period.



A coal transport line of the Cua Ong Coal Preparation Co in Quang Ninh Province. All coal mining areas throughout the country will be required to meet environmental protection standards by 2020.