

Press Review 12/2012 - Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology,

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Short notice: Our new office address: 3rd floor – 170 Tran Duy Hung street, Cau Giay District, Hanoi - Tel/Fax: + 84 4 37835697

No	Title	Date	Source	Region	Catalogue	Description
1	Efforts made to solve dioxin pollution in Vietnam	2/12/2012	Vfej	Vietnam	Pollution	VEA under MONRE held a seminar on dioxin analytical capacity in Vietnam in Hanoi.
2	Rubbish dumps blight residential areas	3/12/2012	VN News	Dong Nai	Environment	Dozens of temporary garbage dumps have formed in residential areas of southern Dong Nai Province due to a shortage of landfill sites, causing serious pollution that affects local people's health.
3	Business leaders discuss investment environment	4/12/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	VBF called for the Government of Viet Nam to take decisive action to enhance economic and financial reform to create a more attractive business climate.
4	Lower sediment levels major concern for Delta	6/12/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Environment	Viet Nam will spend US\$6.3 million next year to examine the impacts of mainstream hydro-power on the downstream Mekong River.
5	Ha Noi to spend \$5b on waste treatment	7/12/2012	VN Net Bridge	Hanoi	Waste Treatment	Ha Noi has approved spending more than VND107 trillion (US\$5.1 billion) on collecting, classifying and properly treating solid waste in a bid to reduce environmental pollution and make the capital city greener by 2030.
6	Denmark commits \$57m in aid	8/12/2012	Dtri News	Vietnam	Other	The Danish Government will extend approximately US\$57 million in non-refundable aid to Vietnam next year, with support to focus on Vietnam's efforts to promote green growth, administrative reform and governing capacity



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Vietnamese – German Office for Water and Environmental Technology

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7	Encroachment of canals, sewers blocks City's waste-water drains	10/12/2012	VN Net Bridge	HCM	Waste Water	Rains and high tides have blocked drains in many areas in HCM City because of illegal building near canals, sewers, manholes and sluice gates.
8	Drought forecast for centre, south	10/12/2012	VN News	South VN	Environment	A sharp decrease in rainfall in the central, Central Highlands and southern regions will likely lead to a huge drought during the 2012-13 dry season
9	Belgian-funded water reservoir opens in Ninh Thuan	12/12/2012	MONRE	Ninh Thuan	Water	The Lanh Ra reservoir project in Ninh Phuoc district of the central coastal province of Ninh Thuan was inaugurated by the provincial People's Committee and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) on December 10.
10	Pollution blitz on craft villages, industries key to new strategy	13/12/2012	VN Net Bridge	Vietnam	Pollution	Viet Nam plans to focus on minimising pollution in craft villages and industrial parks, referred to as the two major hot spots throughout the nation.
11	Toxic waste continues to blight the environment	13/12/2012	VN News	HCM	Waste	HCM City discharges nearly 500 tonnes of hazardous waste each day, but only 10 per cent are treated properly, according to a survey conducted by the Environmental and Natural Resources Institute under the Viet Nam National University-HCM City
12	Improving the efficiency of rural water supply systems	13/12/2012	MONRE	Vinh Long	Water	With the aim to increase the percentage of households in rural areas using safe water to over 40% in 2013, Vinh Long Province considers allocating 55 billion dong from water program.



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13	Groundwater to be inspected	17/12/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Water	Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai has ordered provincial and municipal People's Committees to re-examine the granting of permits for groundwater use.
14	ADB grants \$251m loans to Viet Nam	22/12/2012	VN News	Vietnam	Other	Nguyen Van Binh, Governor of the State Bank of Viet Nam and Tomoyuki Kimura, Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Viet Nam, yesterday signed three loan agreements totalling US\$251 million in Ha Noi.
15	Pollution wipes out oyster farms	24/12/2012	VN News	Danang	Pollution	Over 100 households farming in Son Tra district's Man Quang Bay suffered a devastating blow to their seafood harvest when a dozen hectares of oyster farms were wiped out suspectedly due to water pollution.
16	Ministry targets lower farm produce contamination	26/12/2012	VN Net Bridge	Vietnam	Environment	Amid increasing fears about food safety, Viet Nam aims to cut the contamination rate of plant-origin products by 10 per cent next year.



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1. Efforts made to solve dioxin pollution in Vietnam

The Vietnam Environment Administration (VEA) under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment held a seminar on dioxin analytical capacity in Vietnam on November 30 in Hanoi.

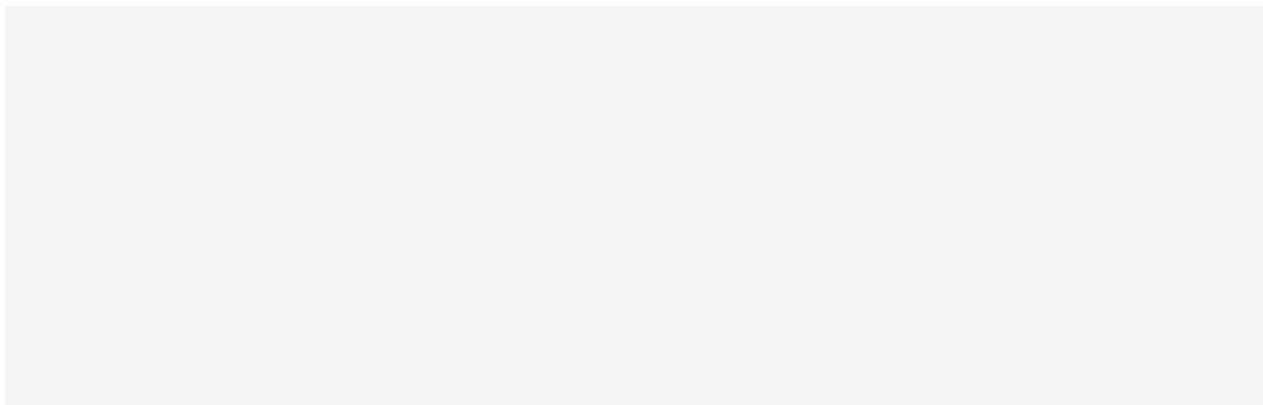
A number of laboratories in Vietnam have been upgraded to serve the research into the consequences of Agent Orange/dioxin in Vietnam , including the facility at the Vietnam-Russia Tropical Centre, and the Analytical Centre in Ho Chi Minh City .

Deputy Director of VEA Le Ke Son said although Vietnam has gained a number of achievements in researching and analysing dioxin pollution, the activities have faced obstacles, including the shortage of personnel.

He called for assistance from the US Government in terms of equipment and personnel training in the field, so that Vietnam can achieve the goal of solving basic problems related to dioxin pollution in Vietnam by 2015.

During 10 years from 1961, the US Army sprayed more than 18.2 million gallon of Agent Orange containing dioxin onto more than 10 percent of land in southern Vietnam , destroying millions of hectares of forest and agricultural land, causing graving impacts to the health of many Vietnamese people and the following generations.

It is estimated that more than 4.8 million Vietnamese were exposed to Agent Orange/dioxin, most of whom live along the Truong Son Road and boundary area with Cambodia . Many of the victims have died while million of their descendants are still living with diseases and poverty due to the affects of Agent Orange.



2. Rubbish dumps blight residential areas

Dozens of temporary garbage dumps have formed in residential areas of southern Dong Nai Province due to a shortage of landfill sites, causing serious pollution that affects local people's health.

More than 2,100 tonnes of waste are generated every day in the province, half of which is toxic industrial waste, according to the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment. However, the province has only one waste treatment factory, which has a limited capacity of 400 tonnes per day.



Industrial waste pollutes the environment in southern Dong Nai Province. There are 42 temporary garbage dumps, covering 23ha of land in the province.

Thus, more and more temporary garbage dumps have appeared. In Long Binh Commune of Bien Hoa City, garbage trucks have disposed of their contents on a patch of fallow land every day for the past two months - turning the area into a de facto dump.

Nguyen Van Binh, a commune resident, said that the number of trucks dumping trash in the commune was increasing day by day - as was the amount of garbage, including domestic waste, industrial waste and dead animals.

The site was so full of garbage that it had begun to overflow into the alley, affecting hundreds of people nearby. "The smell becomes really horrible in the afternoon when the garbage trucks come. How can we keep living here?" he asked.

Residents of Hoa An and Tan Hanh communes are facing the same situation.

An abandoned quarry dozens of metres deep has become known as a good place to dump garbage. Locals once set up barbed wire around the quarry, but it was torn down after one night, said Nguyen Thi Ly, a resident in Hoa An Commune. "Industrial waste has an unbearable smell. We feel sick whenever we breathe it," she said.

According to local authorities, garbage dumping in these places was illegal and those who were doing it probably did not come from the area.

The police have caught some individuals red-handed and fined them between VND700,000-1.3 million (US\$33-61) per truck. However, the situation has yet to improve, perhaps because the fines are so low. Currently, there are 42 temporary garbage dumps, covering 23 hectares of land in the province.

Deputy director of the provincial department of Natural Resources and Environment Vo Van Chanh said because this garbage was being burnt or buried without technical processes, some waste might be absorbed in local water sources and the surrounding environment, which could cause serious harm to those living nearby.

To solve the problem, Chanh said the province has licensed more than 40 organisations and individuals to co-operate with enterprises to collect and treat waste. Some 400 enterprises are in charge of clearing toxic industrial waste every day.

"The department is also building waste landfill sites dozens of hectares wide between cities and districts. The temporary garbage.

3. Business leaders discuss investment environment

Experts speaking at the Viet Nam Business Forum (VBF) in Ha Noi yesterday called for the Government of Viet Nam to take decisive action to enhance economic and financial reform to create a more attractive business climate.

The conference entitled 'Restoring Economic Dynamism' saw business leaders meet to discuss the challenges and opportunities for investment in the country.

According to Christopher Twomey, chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), Viet Nam faced challenges creating macroeconomic stability at a time of unacceptably high inflation, causing tension in the foreign exchange market and high interest rates.

"Many AmCham members found it more difficult to conduct business here than in past years," he said, pointing out that the Government's unsuccessful efforts to sufficiently manage business activity was one of the things discouraging numerous investors.

Chairman of the European Chamber of Commerce in Viet Nam, Preben Hjortlund, said the favourable treatment offered to State enterprises through loans, access to land and more limited profit targets was hampering the growth of the economy. "The Government should boost equitisation to obtain a more competitive market in which the market mechanism can do its work," he said.

Twomey added that although the Government launched anti-corruption efforts in 2004, little progress had been made after eight years, citing a recent AmCham survey that revealed over 80 per cent of respondents listed corruption as one of their top concerns in Viet Nam. "Corruption is getting worse in every factor of doing business here."

"Urgent reforms are strongly needed," he stressed, adding that focus should be placed on addressing the real issues of the banking system and reform of SOEs to head for sound sustainable economic growth.

To improve the situation, Chairman of the Korea Chamber of Business, Kim Jung In, said Viet Nam should do more to restructure State-owned enterprises and improve the competitiveness of the private sector in leading the future economy.

The Ha Noi Young Business Association proposed that the laws and regulations system should be more consistent in order to better encourage investment and create favourable conditions for doing business.

The VBF's infrastructure group suggested that acceptable returns and legal security should be promised to foreign investors and lenders to attract more financing in infrastructure.

Deputy Prime Minister Vu Van Ninh said the Government would introduce policies to create favourable conditions for the development of enterprises, including making capital access easier.

Ninh also said that the minimum wage of Viet Nam remained low in comparison with other countries in the region, and agreed with proposals from... enterprises that it should be increased to a level of 17-18 per cent from next year.

Financial problems

"Viet Nam's fragile financial system is one of the country's biggest economic problems," said Twomey, adding that resolving bad debt needed to be dealt with without delay because the problem did not just affect the banking system, but the whole economy.

According to the VBF's Banking Working Group, the implementation of the Government's banking system restructuring plan had been slower than hoped and less comprehensive in tackling problems such as non-performing loans, cross shareholdings and an over-reliance on real estate collateral for loans.

The group also emphasised the need to return to an agenda of market-based structural reform of the banking industry as soon as possible to enable this industry to efficiently help the economy develop.

In response, the SBV's Deputy Governor Dang Thanh Binh said that concentrated efforts had already been made to resolve bad debts, and the increasing rate of these debts in credit institutions had slowed down since the second quarter. He declared that the ratio of bad debts was expected to be reduced to 5 per cent by the end of 2015.

Binh added that mergers and acquisitions would be put under close watch while the SBV would enhance inspections of share transfers among credit institutions.

Tax issues were also discussed at the forum, with Vu Thu Huong from the Investment and Trade Working Group proposing that the Government have a more consistent tax system and calling for the removal of the advertising and promotion cap.

The VBF was held ahead of the Consultative Group for Viet Nam's annual meeting, which will take place on December 10 with overarching theme 'Laying the Foundation for Sustainable Growth'.

4. Lower sediment levels major concern for Delta

Viet Nam will spend US\$6.3 million next year to examine the impacts of mainstream hydro-power on the downstream Mekong River.

As the country most affected by hydro-power dams upstream, this study could provide Viet Nam with sound scientific-based evidence of any negative impacts.

This would enable it to negotiate with project developers to revise the scale and design of each dam if necessary.

The study is expected to conclude in June, 2015. Funding will be provided by the Vietnamese Government and possibly from international sources.

The Viet Nam National Mekong Committee (VNMC) met development partners at a roundtable meeting on Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta Integrated Water Resources Management held in Ha Noi on Tuesday.

The committee's deputy director General Truong Hong Tien said that the study's terms of reference had been sent to other countries in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB), Laos, Cambodia and Thailand for comment.

It has been submitted for approval to the Vietnamese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

Tien said the study aimed to establish scientific-based data to assess the potential impacts of proposed mainstream hydropower projects on the LMB, including the Mekong Delta in Viet Nam.

This would include river flow, the movement of suspended sediments and nutrients (mud), water quality and biodiversity.

So far, 14 hydro-power dams are being developed on the Lancang River (the upper half of the Mekong River in China), of which four have been completed. In the Lower Mekong Basin, there are another 11 hydro-power dams. However, comprehensive studies on impacts of such dams have been quite limited.

A Strategic Environment Assessment of hydro-power on the mainstream Mekong held by the Mekong River Commission from 2009 to 2010 was among the few. One of the main findings was that decisions to develop the Mekong river were regional.

The assessment team recommended decisions on mainstream dams should be deferred for 10 years so that other options are studied, including partial in-channel diversions and other innovative systems that do not require full-width river dams.

Environmental Systems Engineer Tarek Ketelsen from the International Centre for Environmental Management, which commissioned the study, said there was an understanding among LMB countries that the issue would affect different countries in different ways.

"It was acknowledged that Laos and Cambodia would benefit from the mainstream projects while all the countries agreed that Viet Nam would be most affected," he said.

Ketelsen said that the impacts really came down to sediments and nutrients. Sediments were important to the stability of the coastline while the main agricultural practices, including rice production and fisheries, heavily relied on natural fertilisation that arrived every year.

He said that if blocked by dams, the lower supply of upstream sediments and nutrients would affect delta stability and productivity. It could lead to bank erosion and bridge collapses, disrupting the livelihoods of millions of people.

The study estimated that hydro-power projects on the mainstream Mekong would result in up to 75 per cent reduction in sediment inputs to the Mekong flood plain and delta, which Ketelsen warned would trigger a fundamental change to how the delta worked.

Marc Goichot, WWF's Greater Mekong Programme Co-ordinator, said the impacts of lower Mekong mainstream dams on sediment were intense, even far beyond those on fisheries and biodiversity.

During field observations conducted for over 2.5 years, the WWF team recorded evidence of increasing bank erosion on the coastline of the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta.

While this can be associated with climate change, Goichot believed it was mainly caused by dams plus sand extraction.

Experts have noted that while the Mekong was a trans-boundary river, developing hydro-power dams was still very much done on a unilateral or bilateral government basis initiated by private developers, most of whom are from China, Thailand and even Viet Nam itself.

This appeared to be the opposite of international practices that the mechanisms of managing a trans-boundary river had to be agreed at the top level among governments first.

Ketelsen said the best approach was to establish a regulatory authority which had capacity in terms of institution and finance to enforce appropriate management of the river.

At the moment, the Mekong River Commission involves all four LMB countries. While initially established as a framework for mutual discussion on the Mekong River, it is still a voluntary agreement.

"This is the next step, but international lessons show that it will take a long time," he told Viet Nam News.

The Mekong River, which passes through six countries from China down to Viet Nam (China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam) is one of the few remaining international rivers undam-med over much of its length.

5. Ha Noi to spend \$5b on waste treatment

Ha Noi has approved spending more than VND107 trillion (US\$5.1 billion) on collecting, classifying and properly treating solid waste in a bid to reduce environmental pollution and make the capital city greener by 2030.

Under the new plan, domestic solid waste in the city will be collected, recycled down to organic fertiliser or burnt and dumped at landfills in three suburban zones. Waste will be treated in 16 areas spread across the city.

The city will also build 29 dumping sites for construction and mud waste. Money will be assigned to the projects from the State budget, official development assistance funds and build-operate-transfer loans.

A report on the environment in Viet Nam from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment released last August showed that solid waste in urban, industrial and economic areas has increased on average 10 per cent annually. Of this amount, 46 per cent is from urban areas, 17 per cent from industrial production and the rest from rural areas and traditional craft villages.

By 2015, solid waste is forecast to reach 44 million tonnes. Up to 25 per cent of that amount is expected to be hazardous.

Hoang Duong Tung, vice head of the ministry's Viet Nam Environment Administration told Kinh te & Do thi (Economy & Urban) newspaper that the technology for treating solid waste is currently substandard as most of it is wrongly categorised as being domestic waste and so buried rather than being treated correctly.

Currently, on average, each city in the country has one dumping site for all kinds of waste. Ha Noi and HCM City have four and five respectively.

However, only 16 of the country's 98 dumping sites follow standard procedures for burying waste.

Chairman of the Viet Nam Association for the Conservation of Nature and the Environment, Nguyen Ngoc Sinh, said that urban environmental companies remained weak, especially for processing toxic waste.

Experts have suggested that seeking investment and expanding waste treatment areas so that they are larger and include new technology would be the best solution to the problems.

In Ha Noi, around 5,000 tonnes of solid waste is discharged every day. There are three solid waste incinerators in the city with a capacity of destroying 120-200 kilos per hour.

6. Denmark commits \$57m in aid

The Danish Government will extend approximately US\$57 million in non-refundable aid to Vietnam next year, with support to focus on Vietnam's efforts to promote green growth, administrative reform and governing capacity, Danish Ambassador to Vietnam John Nielsen told a press briefing here yesterday.

During the coming year, Denmark and Vietnam would work together to build a Strategic Partnership on Green Growth, Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Nielsen said.

"Denmark has allocated an additional grant of nearly \$14 million to improve energy efficiency in small- and medium-sized enterprises and buildings," he said. "The continued high level of Danish development assistance to Vietnam reflects a commitment to support the country in fostering a green and socially sustainable economy."

Nielsen expressed his hopes that Denmark and Vietnam would sign a Comprehensive Co-operation Agreement next year intended to strengthen political, commercial and cultural relations between the two countries.

Vietnam was one of ten countries to which Denmark would give commercial development priority in 2013, he said, adding that Denmark would also continue to prioritise support for legal and parliamentary reform, transparency and accountability.

7. Encroachment of canals, sewers blocks City's waste-water drains

Rains and high tides have blocked drains in many areas in HCM City because of illegal building near canals, sewers, manholes and sluice gates.

Houses have been built along the Chin Xiang Canal in Go Vap District's Ward 5 along a 15-metre section that extends to the downstream area, according to a report in Nguoi Lao Dong (the Labourer) newspaper.

The sewer gate at Residential Zone 13 in this 15-metre section releases waste water into the canal, which is now half of its width.

"The water that flows from the canal into the Vam Thuat River does not drain quickly and flows into the street when there are heavy rains and high tides," said Le Van Dung, a security guard at Residential Zone 13.

The district's local authorities have met many times to discuss the problem but have not come up with a solution.

Similarly, many households have been built along the Ban Don Canal in District 7 on 12, 14, 47 and 79 streets.

The city Urban Drainage Company said illegal encroachment on waterways by houses was one of the main reasons for flooding in the city.

Forty-two canals in the city do not drain waste water well because of the illegal construction.

The city's districts 7, 9 and Thu Duc, Binh Thanh and Go Vap districts have the highest number of canals with illegal construction nearby.

Encroachment has occurred on 11,804 metres of sewer routes, 372 manholes and 40 sluice gates in the city.

The HCM City Steering Centre for the Anti-Flooding Programme said 4,510 metres of sewer routes in District 10 had the most severe problems.

8. Drought forecast for centre, south

A sharp decrease in rainfall in the central, Central Highlands and southern regions will likely lead to a huge drought during the 2012-13 dry season, warns the National Hydro-meteorological Forecast Centre.

The centre's Deputy Director Le Thanh Hai said that the quantity of rainfall in some areas has decreased by 70-90 percent from the average level of previous years.

“The rainy season in these areas ended earlier than previous years and the overall quantity of rainfall is lower, leading to severe water shortages,” he explained.

The rainfall in central Quang Tri province, for example, was just 1,700mm so far this year, while the average annual rainfall in the province was 2,500mm, according to local authorities.

By the end of November, the average water level of reservoirs in most central provinces was between 20-50 percent lower than their designed capacity. Water levels in central Ha Tinh, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces fell even more dramatically, with a 60-80 percent difference between actual levels and capacity.

Meanwhile, rainfall in this dry season was expected to be less than previous years, particularly in the central region, Hai said.

Salt water will also likely intrude between 40-60km inland in central and southern regions. The dry season lasts from November to May in the Central Highlands, from November to April in the south and from January to July in the central region.

However, drought has already been recorded in some areas. In the Central Highlands province of Gia Lai, the drought has caused poor harvests in eastern districts.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development reported in May this year that nearly 50,000ha of crops nationwide were damaged by droughts during the last dry season.

9. Belgian-funded water reservoir opens in Ninh Thuan

The Lanh Ra reservoir project in Ninh Phuoc district of the central coastal province of Ninh Thuan was inaugurated by the provincial People's Committee and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) on December 10.

Total investment in the project is 7.75 million EUR, which includes non-refundable capital of 2.6 million EUR from the Belgian Government, and 1.59 million EUR of absolved foreign debt, and the rest from the State budget. The project was signed in June 2006, with construction of the 14 million cubic meter reservoir beginning in November 2008.

The two-dam reservoir will provide water for over 1,000 hectares of agricultural land.

10. Pollution blitz on craft villages, industries key to new strategy

Viet Nam plans to focus on minimising pollution in craft villages and industrial parks, referred to as the two major hot spots throughout the nation.

This is one of the main points under the new National Strategy for Environmental Protection announced by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. The strategy looks to 2020 with a vision to 2030.

The national plan for environmental protection aims to control the increasing spread of environmental pollution, degradation of natural resources and biodiversity decline, said Deputy Minister Bui Cach Tuyen.

Environmental protection efforts were proving decisive in furthering sustainable development for the country, he said.

Statistics show that about 1,000 traditional craft villages now need financial support to deal with environmental pollution, said Nguyen Van Tai, director of the ministry's Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment. Viet Nam still has about 3,500 traditional craft villages.

The pollution in villages includes waste water disposal, mounting piles of garbage and air pollution from the burning of toxic substances used in small production firms,

"It is estimated that it will cost about VND50 trillion (US\$2.3 billion) to remove environmental pollution from the 1,000 craft villages by 2020," Tai said.

At present, only 60 per cent of industrial parks throughout Viet Nam have waste-water treatment systems meeting health standards. This will hopefully be increased to 95 per cent by 2020.

The national strategy sets up four targets for 2020. These are to reduce environmental pollution, restore polluted and degraded areas, control the decline of biodiversity, strengthen the response to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Tai said that the total cost for implementing the national strategy by 2020 was initially estimated at \$50.8 billion.

This will be mobilised from different sources, including the State budget, local budgets, business organisations and individuals, he said.

Although the project has received positive feedback from scientists attending the launching ceremony, institute director Tai admitted that it had failed to clearly separate which regions, provinces or cities were to receive priority in treating environmental pollution.

Overall solutions have been pointed out, Tai said. The first was to make a profound change in a sense of duty among all authorities, sectors, enterprises and people
The second was to perfect a legal framework and promote scientific research in environmental protection.

Thirdly, the percentage of environmental expenditure from the State budget needs to be increased to 2 per cent of total budget expenditure from its present 1 per cent

Lastly, co-operation with other regional countries, the world and international organisations needs to be enhanced to prevent and control trans-boundary environmental pollution, bolster biodiversity conservation and climate change response.

11. Toxic waste continues to blight the environment

HCM City discharges nearly 500 tonnes of hazardous waste each day, but only 10 per cent are treated properly, according to a survey conducted by the Environmental and Natural Resources Institute under the Viet Nam National University-HCM City.

The city contains 49 waste treatment plants licensed to handle toxic waste, yet only 19 companies are actually capable of treating it, said the institute's deputy director Le Thanh Hai.

"The remaining waste is treated improperly by businesses themselves or by private waste treatment plants," Hai said.

In some cases, hazardous waste was also discarded without treatment.

"Many businesses hire private waste treatment companies to treat their toxic waste, but these enterprises are not licensed to handle the waste because they lack the proper equipment," he added.

Often, according to Hai, businesses could not classify harmful waste because they lacked the necessary equipment.

"Such hazardous waste comes not only from industrial production plants and businesses, but also households," Hai said. "Many local people find it hard to distinguish between toxic and normal waste. Used batteries, for example, are classified as toxic waste, but you can still find them in household garbage dumps."

Deputy Director of HCM City Environmental Company Nguyen Minh Hoang told Thoi bao Kinh te Sai Gon Online (Sai Gon Economic Times) that the city's treatment plants were unable to treat the huge amount of waste discharged each day.

That waste mainly consists of fuel, batteries, chemicals, light bulbs and printing ink, as well as other waste from the pharmaceutical and metallurgy sector.

HCM City plans to implement 39 projects that will treat all wastewater discharge as well as solid and toxic waste from factories, hospitals and households by 2015, according to the city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

Infrastructure projects, which will put facilities in place to treat the solid waste, make up 13 of the planned projects. A toxic-waste treatment plant with a capacity of 21 tonnes a day has already gone into operation.

12. Improving the efficiency of rural water supply systems

With the aim to increase the percentage of households in rural areas using safe water to over 40% in 2013, Vinh Long Province considers allocating 55 billion dong from water program funding to expand network construction associated with improving water quality and exploiting power efficiently.

The Vinh Long's Center for Rural Water and Sanitation in conjunction with the districts plan to review the construction of water supply systems, upgrade the current water supply to the communes to ensure the water quality.

In 2012, from a variety of sources of capital, Vinh Long province has invested nearly 70 billion dong to build nine new water supply system with a design capacity of each station from 240 - 300 m³/day and execute 24 water pipelines expansion projects. The province will focus investment in completing the construction of 28 water supply stations for 22 communes and 24 water supply stations in flood prone residential areas, raising the proportion of the rural population using water clean to 67.5%, in which the proportion of rural households using safe water is 37%.

Currently, Vinh Long has 106 water supply stations with a total capacity of 23,900 m³/day and 6,000 wells built with UNICEF funding. The objective of Vinh Long province from 2015 to mobilize new resources to build 43 water supply stations and expand other 70 stations, raising the water supply capacity to 50,000 m³/day.

13. Groundwater to be inspected

Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai has ordered provincial and municipal People's Committees to re-examine the granting of permits for groundwater use.

He also asked the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to work with the committees to inspect the quality of groundwater for safety in response to press reports of possible contamination of water supplies in major cities.

In September, about 150 households in an apartment block in Ha Noi's My Dinh Commune were shocked to learn that the water they had been using for the past several years had tested to contain extremely high levels of arsenic.

The results showed that the samples were contaminated with arsenic at 37 times higher than the acceptable level. The water, provided from a well, had been reportedly been of a reddish colour, prompting the tests.

An estimated 73 per cent of capital city residents use well water for daily use.

Arsenic, a colorless and tasteless chemical, is a harmful substance that can cause various diseases, including cancer.

Dr Le Ke Son, deputy director of the ministry's Administration of Environment said that groundwater nationwide was contaminated with saltwater and heavy chemicals.

In the Red River and Mekong Delta regions, saltwater intrusion was widespread due to industrial pollution, he said.

In Ha Noi, a number of drilled wells contain phosphate of 0.4mg per litre over than allowed levels. In the northern mountainous provinces of Ha Giang and Tuyen Quang, the amount of iron was up to 20mg per litre, 20 times higher than allowed.

Groundwater in the Red River and Mekong Delta regions also had high amounts of arsenic of about 10mg per litre, far above the allowed level of 0.01mg per litre, he said.

14. ADB grants \$251m loans to Viet Nam

Nguyen Van Binh, Governor of the State Bank of Viet Nam and Tomoyuki Kimura, Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Viet Nam, yesterday signed three loan agreements totalling US\$251 million in Ha Noi.

The loans are aimed at helping Viet Nam strengthen education quality, ensuring a reliable electricity supply and improving flood and drought management and mitigation.

"Viet Nam's future growth will depend on a labour force skilled enough to meet the needs of the job market and a reliable electricity supply to meet rapidly growing energy demands," said Kumara. "It also needs funds to mitigate risks posed by floods and droughts."

A \$90 million concessional loan from the ADB's Asian Development Fund for the Second Upper Secondary Education Development Project will help improve the readiness of upper secondary school graduates for tertiary and vocational career development. This will be achieved by enhancing the quality of upper-secondary education to meet international standards, improving access to upper-secondary education for disadvantaged groups, including girls and ethnic students, and strengthening the management of upper-secondary education.

Another \$110.19 million loan represents the second tranche of a \$730 million power transmission investment programme to Viet Nam that the ADB approved in December 2011. The loan partially supports the implementation of the seventh National Power Development Master Plan to ensure supply to industrial, commercial and residential consumers.

The project also supports Viet Nam's efforts to improve the operations of the National Power Transmission Corporation. The Agence Francaise de Developpment (AFD) will co-finance the project with 75 million euros (more than \$99 million).

In addition, to help Viet Nam improve flood and drought management and reduce economic losses, the ADB provided a loan of \$45 million, while the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) offered a grant of \$5.9 million.

To improve flood and drought preparedness, the project will link infrastructure upgrades in Dong Thap and Tien Giang provinces in the Mekong Delta with community-based disaster-risk management and enhanced regional forecasting.

On the same day, the Vietnamese Ministry of Planning and Investment and the South Korean Embassy also signed an agreement for South Korea to lend Viet Nam US\$1.2 billion, which will be disbursed for projects during 2012-15.

The agreement will focus on boosting the development of the transport and drainage systems as well as recyclable energy, information and technology, health care, capacity building and agricultural and rural development.

Bui Quang Vinh, Minister of Planning and Investment, said the Vietnamese Government appreciated South Korea's growing support despite the global economic difficulties.

South Korea is currently the second largest investor in Viet Nam out of a total of 96 countries and territories with investment projects in the country.

15. Pollution wipes out oyster farms

Over 100 households farming in Son Tra district's Man Quang Bay suffered a devastating blow to their seafood harvest when a dozen hectares of oyster farms were wiped out suspectedly due to water pollution.

An estimated 1,000 tonnes of oyster have died over the past five days since fishermen made the first discovery last Monday.

It's the first major loss of harvest that locals have seen in 20 years.

Tran Thi Xi, 54, who lost 3 tonnes of oyster, said polluted water would be a main reason for shellfish dying en masse.

"Oysters rarely die of an illness. Water at the bay would likely have been polluted by waste from Tho Quang seafood processing zone which is just 1km away," Xi said.

She said the water on the farm turned foul five days ago and oysters began to die.

Xi's husband added: "A stink across a large area woke me up at midnight and I found that oysters had become rotten by the next morning. I thought they might have died from an illness, but the smell from the bay water continues. We struggled to save the oyster farm, but we failed."

Nguyen Dieu, director of the city's natural resources and environment department, said experts have been examining water samples from the area. "We're trying to establish the cause of the oyster deaths. The city warned two years ago that local people should not farm at the bay because of the low quality water," he said.

"The department and the district administration will solve the problem soon."

In 2010, the city invested VND10 billion (\$476,000) to build a centralised waste water treatment station for Tho Quang seafood processing zone with a capacity of 3,000 cubic metres per day.

However the station only treats around half the volume waste water discharged by the 15 companies in the area.

In August, the city also fined five companies from the seafood processing zone for wrongful disposal of untreated waste.

Tran Thi Hoa, 70, said her family was plunged into debt when their 10 tonnes of oysters died just one month before harvest time.

"I invested VND320 million (\$15,000) to breed oysters from February and would have collected around VND1 billion (\$48,000) next month. But now I've lost it all," she groaned.

"Meanwhile, I have to pay back a VND100 million (\$4,700) loan, which matures next month." Oyster farming has been a major source of income for over 700 people living in the coastal district, providing a monthly income of around VND7 million (\$330) per capita in recent years. "The 2,000sq.m farm used to produce a net profit of VND300 million (\$14,000) each year. Oysters often grow well in the area, even though the climate has changed dramatically in recent years," said Huynh Thi Vinh.- Vinh, 41, had to carry away 10 tonnes of rotten oyster and clean the farm for the next crop.

"I would have earned VND500 million (\$24,000) from next month's crop, but all I've got now are piles of shells. It's the worst harvest I've seen in the decades since we started farming here," Vinh added. — VNS

16. Ministry targets lower farm produce contamination

Amid increasing fears about food safety, Viet Nam aims to cut the contamination rate of plant-origin products by 10 per cent next year, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development announced at a workshop on the quality of agro-forestry and fishery products on Monday.

In 2012, agriculture and rural development departments in 46 localities discovered 961 units violating regulations, accounting for 18.7 per cent of the approximately 12,000 agro-forestry and fishery production and trade establishments inspected, said the ministry's plant protection department director Nguyen Xuan Hong.

Inspectors found that 6.8 per cent of samples inspected contained unacceptably high pesticide residues.

Hong said the department was working with provincial authorities to find out where these products came from and take measures to tackle the situation.

The department also tested nearly 700 samples of domestic and imported plant protection chemicals and found 11 samples of imported chemicals that failed to meet safety standards.

The department would increase inspections and quarantines and test more samples of fruit and vegetables, both domestic and foreign products, from now until the upcoming Tet (Lunar New Year) festival, Hong said.

The ministry decided to punish more than 5,900 cases of violations this year with a total fine of more than VND10 billion (US\$480,000). Most violations concerned using banned substances in cattle-feed production and failing to provide a clean environment for aquaculture.

Minister Cao Duc Phat asked relevant agencies to implement measures to ensure food safety and hygiene, tracing the origin of foods of all kinds and focusing on essential farm produce such as fruits, vegetables, chickens, pork and seafood.

Management would be tightened throughout the production process, while qualified producers would be encouraged and violators would be strictly punished, he said.

The Laws on Plant Protection and Animal Health, which would create a legal framework for handling such cases, were expected to be completed in 2013 and 2014, respectively, Phat said.

Deputy Director of Viet Nam Food Administration Nguyen Thanh Phong told Tin Tuc (News) Newspaper that food production businesses were always encouraged to meet international standards on food safety and hygiene such as ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) and HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points).

Meeting these standards, which take into account criteria such as proper equipment and human resources, would not only increase businesses' prestige and competitiveness but also help protect consumers' health, he said.