

Newsletter from China (03/23/2007)

1. China drafting first “circular economy” law (2007-3-21)

China is drafting its first law on creating a so-called “circular economy” to provide a legal framework for its national sustainable development strategy, the country’s top environmental legislator announced recently. Mao Rubai, chairman of the Environmental and Resources Protection Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC), said the draft law, designed to improve resource efficiency, will be submitted for review in August and is expected to pass at the end of the year.

The goal of the law is to bring attention to a wide range of environmental considerations as China continues its high-speed economic growth. The law requires low energy consumption and high efficiency, low emissions of pollutants, and minimal waste discharge, using the “3-R” principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle. According to Mao, the draft includes basic management requirements to reduce resources and recycle them where possible.

“Some mandatory systems with details are written into the draft, which provide the law with a high possibility of practice,” Mao said. For example, one article instructs industries to assume responsibility for “taking back” and recycling the packing materials from their products. The draft also demands that different economic sectors, including governments, save water and energy and reuse wastewater, solid waste, and waste heat. It also calls for the recycling of larger waste products such as abandoned vehicles and ships, mechanical and electrical products, and computers and other “e-waste.”

Incentives are included in the draft, such as establishing a special fund for developing the circular economy as well as preferential tax, investment, and government purchasing policies for enterprises and agencies performing circular measures. The draft also stipulates certain penalties for groups that do not.

When drafting the circular economy law, China learned from the experiences of many industrialized countries, especially Germany and Japan, which have rich

practice in waste recycling and developing a circular economy and society, Mao said. But China has had to adapt these models to its special conditions, he noted.

Different voices have cast doubts on the draft, however. One environmental expert, who wishes to remain anonymous, said the law was drafted just as a token element of the central government's sustainable development strategy. "Comparing the draft with the Law on Promoting Clean Production, which took effect in 2003, this is no breakthrough. It is very hard to see the necessity to draft a new law," the expert noted. "Many articles in the draft are very hard to put into practice in China, like asking producers to collect and recycle packing materials. Furthermore, the draft does not include clear and tough punishment for those who violate the rules of the circular economy."

2. Village tired of foreign garbage (China Daily, 2007-01-18)

The Emma Maersk was loaded down with Chinese-made Christmas gifts when she set out for Europe, but when the world's largest container ship returned to her home port, she carried a much less jolly cargo nearly 200,000 tons of foreign garbage.

Much of it was dumped on Lianjiao, a village in Nanhai District in the city of Foshan, leaving local authorities with no option but to get tough on the local enterprises that have accepted the waste.

"We are still investigating who imported this garbage," said Huang Songhua, vice-director of the Nanhai Environmental Protection Bureau.

Lianjiao is already home to about 200,000 tons of waste plastic and 500,000 tons of waste paper and cardboard from both overseas and home. The quality of its air and water have declined because of pollutants unleashed by the more than 400 local garbage recycling and processing plants there.

"Ninety percent of them (the recycling and processing plants) are running without licenses. They process collected garbage inappropriately by just burning it without separating it," Huang said.

And the damage is severe.

"The land and water are so polluted that it would take over 100 years to rehabilitate them," said He Pinjing, director of solid waste institute of Tongji University. "It is already a major headache to handle our own waste. How are we supposed to accommodate overseas waste?"

In an attempt to prevent the situation from deteriorating further, the Nanhai government recently ordered all garbage recyclers and processors in Lianjiao and six other adjacent villages to cease operations before January 18.

According to a CCTV report, the government, in conjunction with the local security bureau and fire department, has set up monitoring stations at all points of entry into Nanhai to bar any vehicles carrying waste plastic from entering the district. Waste plastic is one of the major sources of pollution in the district.

"The waste plastic recycling business will be terminated in Nanhai," said district Vice-Director Feng Yongkang.

Enforcement of the ban will involve a variety of measures.

"Plants found operating after January 18 will be forced to shut down. Those running without licenses or are unqualified will be banned immediately," a government official told reporters.

"All of the garbage left at Lianjiao will be sent to a local environmentally friendly electricity plant to be burned to generate electricity."

Choked with the black smoke that pours from chimneys of its garbage plants and surrounded by rivers that have been blackened by pollution, Lianjiao has processed more than 200,000 tons of garbage per year during the past 20 years. The volume of its daily trade in garbage is nearly 750 tons, making it the heart of Nanhai's waste plastic recycling industry.

3. Sewage collection and treatment system to be expanded (Shanghai, 2007-01-24)

By the end of this year, the Sewage Collection and Treatment System will cover the urban area of Shanghai and the sewage emission will reach the state standard.

On January 23rd, the pipeline-laying in the third phase of Shanghai Sewage Harness Project has been finished, and the whole work is estimated to be completed

by the end of this year, one year advance of the plan. Till that time, the Sewage Collection and Treatment System will cover the urban area of Shanghai and the sewage emission will reach the state standard.

The third phase of the Project started from December 2003, consist of sewage pipeline system, the 2nd Zhuyuan Sewage Treatment Plant, sewage collection system and other sub-items. Mainly including the north of Puxi Suzhou River, the south of Zaobang, the north of Pudong Zhaojiagou, and the urban area where the sewage has not been properly treated, the third phase of the Project is to cover 171.68 square kilometers, serving the population of 2.431 million, with designed sewage flow of 1.0883 million tons a day.

In the construction of the third phase project, the most difficult task is the laying of the gigantic pipeline which is 25 kilometers in length and 2.7 meters in diameter. And in some parts the pipe is even 25 meters under the surface of Huangpu River. Between the parallel lines, there is only 1.8 meters----- . Considering that, the construction enterprise decided to lay the two pipes from different ends simultaneously. And the is only 48 days between the completion of the first pipe and the second pipe.

Biogas is another hot potato in the construction. Sometimes its concentration in the air reached 11.2%. To solve this problem, the construction enterprise increased ventilation equipment and appointed technicians to monitor and record the biogas concentration. Once the concentration exceeds the safe indicator, all workers will be informed to evacuate immediately.