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G8 Environmental Futures Forum 2000

The G8 Environmental Futures Forum 2000 was held in the Shonan Village Center in Kanagawa on 14 and 15 February. Participants discussed domestic best practices addressing climate change that had been selected in advance by G8 countries and the European Commission.

Five working groups held parallel sessions to discuss best practices involving energy and industry; household and commercial (including buildings); transportation; agriculture, land use and forestry; and cross-sectoral categories. Discussions were summarized as conclusions and recommendations from the Forum to G8 countries.

In the conclusions, best practices were understood to be the optimal or most progressive initiatives undertaken by governments or other social actors within a country. The important characteristics of best practices were identified to enhance future initiatives to address climate change. The recommendations included suggestions that information exchanges and evaluations about successes and failures should be continued, and G8 countries should learn from other countries' experiences. The outcomes of G8 Environmental Futures Forum (EFF) will be reported at the G8 Environment Ministers' Meeting to be held from 7 to 9 April in Otsu, Shiga Prefecture.

The G8 EFF was attended by 48 persons from G8 countries and the European Commission, representing governments, academia, NGOs, industry and international

organizations. It was organized by the Environment Agency in cooperation with Kanagawa Prefecture and Kanagawa Foundation for Academic and Cultural Exchange. 



Ms. Yasuhiko Okada, Administrative Vice Minister of the Environment Agency, made a welcome address at the opening of the G8 Environmental Futures Forum

ECO ASIA Long-term Perspective Project

The Seventh International Workshop on the ECO ASIA Long-term Perspective Project (LTPP) took place in Shonan Village, Kanagawa, Japan, on 22 and 23 February 2000. The LTPP is a project of ECO ASIA, Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific which annually held with the participation of environment ministers and high level officials from the Asia-Pacific region. The workshop was organized by the Environment Agency and attended by 44 participants from 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region and 7 international organizations. Mr. Saburo Kato, President of the Research Institute for Environment and Society, chaired the Workshop.

Participants actively discussed the following topics.

(1) Eco-Consciousness, Outlook for the Environment

Participants shared information on progress made in research on the four core concepts developed at the Phase I of LTPP (Eco-Consciousness, Eco-Partnership, Eco-

Technology/Eco-Investment, and Eco-Policy Linkages) since last year's workshop, in accordance with the work plan for Phase II. The global environmental outlook for 2025, based on three scenarios which have been newly defined since the last workshop through involvement of scientists from developing countries and use of the latest socio-economic data, including that on the economic crisis, was presented by the team of the National Institute for Environmental Studies of the Environment Agency making full use of the AIM model.

Participants recognized many options for climate change mitigation which policy makers of developing countries can choose from and suggested that political realities be taken into account, such as recent basic policy changes in water management and flood control in several countries.


(2) Environmental effects of the Asian economic/financial crises

Experiences and cases were presented in relation to the

changing economic conditions in the region and influences on environmental policy, and appropriate future environmental policies were discussed.

(3) Contributions to the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific 2000 (MCED4)


Participants discussed the possible contributions of ECO ASIA /LTPP to this conference, to be held in Kitakyusyu Japan in September this year. It was reported that a synthesis policy paper drafted by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) will be submitted to MCED4 as a conference document from ECO ASIA, since IGES has been recognized as a think tank for ECO ASIA/LTPP.

The outcome of this Workshop and the progress to date on the LTPP will be reported at ECO ASIA 2000 to be held on 3 September, immediately before the ESCAP environmental ministerial level meeting. 

Shrines and Temples of Nikko Inscribed on World Heritage List

In December 1999 the UNESCO World Heritage Committee under the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage decided that the shrines and temples of Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture, together with their

natural surroundings, should be inscribed as a World Heritage site. The Environment Agency and the Agency for Cultural Affairs proposed them as candidates in June 1998. Once inscribed, the host state is obligated to take measures for a

site's protection and maintenance. In Nikko's case, a core area of 50.8 ha and buffer zone of 373.2 ha includes Futarasan Shrine, Toshogu Shrine, and Rinnoji Temple. 

Illegal Waste Export to the Philippines


Items including soiled diapers and intravenous tubes were found in a shipment an industrial waste treatment company from Tochigi Prefecture had exported to the Philippines, labeled as used paper for recycling. On 13 December, the Philippine government demanded that the shipment be returned to Japan within thirty days, citing the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, to which both countries are signatories.

On receipt of this demand,

Japan's Environment Agency, Ministries of International Trade and Industry, Health and Welfare and Foreign Affairs sent an investigation team to Manila. The team found the entire shipment (122 containers totaling 2,300 tonnes) to be hazardous waste. The Director-General of the Environment Agency and other ministers concerned ordered the company to return the shipment to Japan.

As the company did not take action within the time limit given, the Agency and Ministries arranged the return of the


containers to Japan and unloading in Tokyo. They ordered the company to properly dispose of the waste by 18 January, but because the company did not comply, the government arranged for proper incineration.

To follow-up, seven Japanese ministries and agencies concerned discussed measures to prevent recurrence of illegal traffic of wastes, and formed a joint working group with the Philippines on 13 March. 

Ban on Tiger Parts Trade

The Cabinet Order under the law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (LCES) was amended on 21 December 1999. Amended Cabinet Order bans domestic trade of tiger bone,

penis and materials for human consumption, and also other goods which contain tiger bone and penis as the parts and derivatives such as traditional medicines. Prohibition of domestic trade of tiger parts by


the law as well as international trade by CITES will contribute conservation of tiger population. The amendments will enter into force on 1 April 2000. 

Seized Animals Returned to Indonesia

On 2 February, six animals seized at a pet shop in Osaka last year were returned to Indonesia by air. Last May, four orangutans and two monkeys (Siamang gibbon and Javan gibbon) were seized when the owner of the shop was arrested and subsequently prosecuted on

charges related to the Law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

On the Indonesian government's request, after consultation among the government agencies concerned, preparations were made to return

the animals while they were kept temporarily at the Oji Zoo in Kobe. After the necessary procedures based on CITES they were transferred to Indonesia, at the expense of the defendants. 

The Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting among Japan, China and Korea

On 26 and 27 February in Beijing, China hosted the second Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) among Japan, China and the Republic of Korea. China was represented by Mr. Xie Zhenhua, Minister of the State Environmental Protection Administration, Japan by Ms. Shimizu Kayoko, Minister of State and Director-General of the Environment Agency, and Korea by Ms. Kim Myung-Ja, Minister of the Ministry of Environment.

The Ministers expressed their wishes to have more concrete projects-style cooperation among their three countries. They reaffirmed their wishes that the three countries would continue developing projects at working level, in particular projects of raising consciousness of environmental community, fresh water (lake) pollution and land-based marine pollution prevention, and cooperation in the field of environmental industry, about which the three countries have already initiated project concept proposals for cooperation.

They noted with appreciation the progress made by their three countries in addressing climate change, and affirmed the common recognition that all Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)



Three Ministers at the joint press conference (from left to right, Ms. Shimizu, Mr. Xie and Ms. Kim)

should further strengthen their domestic efforts and international cooperation, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities, respective capabilities, and their social and economic conditions, in order to achieve its ultimate objective. They indicated their intentions to make efforts for a successful outcome of the 6th Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC and to bring the Kyoto Protocol into force as early as possible .

The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of TEMM as a forum for fostering regional environmental cooperation and sustainable development. They shared the view that they should contribute to the success of important regional and global environmental meetings to be

held, including the 4th ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED), and the comprehensive review of Agenda 21 to be held in 2002.

It was also agreed that the three countries would cooperate on ecological restoration in western China, an important topic for the host country. At the end of the meeting, the Ministers signed a Joint Communiqué referring to regional environmental cooperation.

The first session of TEMM was hosted by Korea last year. The next meeting will be held in Japan. Before the Tripartite meeting this year, the Ministers met with Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji. 🌐


Joint Japan-UK Research on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals

On 7 December representatives of the Environment Agency of Japan and the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions of the United Kingdom signed an arrangement to begin joint research on endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs).

The work will be implemented by governmental officials and researchers from universities and institutes in both countries. Main topics for the research on EDCs include (i) estimating the

behavior of EDCs in the environment, (ii) comparative research concerning aberration of marine and freshwater organisms in both countries, including quantifying endocrine disrupting effects on fish, (iii) developing methods for assessing risks on wildlife, and (iv) comparative analysis of environmental risks to wildlife. The arrangement is effective for five years.

As reported previously in the *JEQ* (Vol. 4 No.1), Japan and the United Kingdom had been

discussing the possibility of this joint research since the second Japan-UK Environmental Policy Dialogue meeting of high level officials in February 1999. On the occasion of the meeting of G8 Environment Ministers in March 1999, Mr. Kenji Manabe, the Director-General of the Environment Agency and Mr. Michael Meacher, Minister for the Environment, agreed to go ahead with the joint activity. 

Revised Ordinance – Ozone Depleting Substances


In December 1999 the Environment Agency announced a partial revision of an enforcement ordinance for the Law Concerning the Protection of the Ozone Layer through the Control of Specified Substances and Other Measures, in response to agreement reached at the 10th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the Ozone Layer, held in November 1998.

The main effect of the change is to extend the deadline for

permitted production of three ozone depleting substances — CFCs, carbon tetrachloride, and 1,1,1 trichloroethane — for laboratory and analytical purposes relating to “essential uses.” The deadline has been extended from the end of 1999 until the end of 2005.

Essential uses are those where the substances are needed for human health, safety and functioning of society, and where no technologically or economically viable options are

available. One example is for metered-dose inhalers for asthma.


In 1998, 30 tonnes of carbon tetrachloride were manufactured in Japan for experimental research and analysis uses. No CFCs or 1,1,1 trichloroethane were produced during that year. For reference, 19,602 tonnes and 2,463 tonnes of carbon tetrachloride were produced in Japan in 1989 and 1995, respectively. 

Yu Yu a Male?

Yu Yu may be a male, according to a research team which carried out a DNA test on the crested ibis chick that hatched 21 May 1999. Yu Yu was born from parents presented

to Japan from China last year.

It is impossible to determine the sex of the crested ibis from external appearances. There are two main methods to determine sex before breeding: one is by

blood test, the other is by DNA test. The latter method was used in order to minimize stress on the bird. 

Study Report on Environmental Reporting

A report of the outcomes of discussions by the Environment Agency's Study Group on the Promotion of Environmental Reporting was compiled and released publicly November 30, 1999.

1. Background and outline of discussions

The Environment Agency considers environmental reporting to be an important means to encourage environmental protection activities of businesses. To date, the Agency has made efforts to promote environmental reports by initiatives such as preparing and publicizing technical guidelines to prepare an environmental report, providing support for the Grand Prize for Environmental Reports which recognizes outstanding environmental reports, and supporting the Environmental Report Network which consists of companies, NGOs and people of experience or academic standing.

The Study Group on the Promotion of Environmental Reporting was established to discuss overall efforts for expanding environmental reporting and ways to ensure the credibility of third-party opinions, etc. The Study Group consists of seventeen persons, including specialists such as people with experience or from academic backgrounds, and from industry and citizens' groups.

2. Outline of the Study Report

The report starts with clarifying the significance of environmental reporting and then extensively covers ways to promote the expansion of environmental

reporting. Emphasis is put on the consideration of ways to ensure the credibility of third-party verification and opinions, a topic which has attracted considerable attention recently.

The contents of the report are broad, but the main conclusions are as follows.

(1) Basic perspectives about promoting environmental reporting

It is important that leading businesses such as international companies continue striving to improve quality, and that medium- and small-sized enterprises commence environmental reporting. In addition, it is important to promote continuous development in environmental reporting by fostering common elements of environmental reporting, making the best use of the diversity through the creativity of report writers at the same time.

(2) Ways to promote environmental reporting

To date environmental reporting has been promoted through such initiatives as developing guidelines which take into account various perspectives including those of developed by the Environment Agency, the award system for environmental reports, and the exchange of information among companies, NGOs and specialists. It is important to enhance these activities, and to address new topics such as study and discussions about indicators to assess environmental performance.

(3) Perspectives and issues relating to ways to ensure credibility

Many ways exist to ensure credibility, such as securing the means for two-way communication and executing rigorous internal management. The use of third-party opinion and verification is also one way to achieve this.

A number of ways exist to use third-party opinion, including the examination of (i) the accuracy of information provided in environmental reports; (ii) comprehensiveness of the contents of environmental reports; (iii) the suitability of measures actually being conducted; and (iv) compliance with requirements such as regulations, etc.

More discussions are needed on many issues which remain to be addressed, such as concerns about possible misunderstanding regarding the content and extent of guarantees due to the lack of standard language and procedures relating to third party-opinions, and the absence of a qualification system to ensure the quality of parties that conduct verification.

3. Future directions of Environment Agency initiatives


In a sense, the Study Group report provides an overall picture regarding the significance of environmental reports as well as how to promote them further. In addition, it clarifies current issues such as those concerning reliability, especially third-party opinions.

On the basis of this report, the Environment Agency will continue to promote the award system in the appropriate manner, and

support the activities of the Environmental Report Network. At the same time, it will begin studies and discussions on environmental performance

indicators to be included in environmental reporting.

In addition, based on this report, the Environment Agency will continue to promote studies

and discussions on methods of ensuring the credibility of third-party opinions. 


New Ordinance on Dioxins

In response to the serious concern about dioxins in Japan in recent years, national and local governments have been making considerable efforts to reduce dioxin emissions into the environment. As a part of efforts to reduce the threats from dioxins on the environment and human health, on 15 January a new law, Law Concerning Special Measures Against Dioxins, came into effect.

The new cabinet order for implementation of the Law, which was decided by the Cabinet on 21

December 1999, establishes the tolerable daily intake (TDI) for dioxins at 4 picograms TEQ per day per kilogram of body weight, in terms of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin. The TDI is defined as the average daily amount of intake over a lifetime which is thought to have no adverse health effects on humans. Japan's TDI is based on extensive studies in Japan and matches the World Health Organization's recommended amount.

The cabinet order also specifies

facilities which are subject to the law, including certain waste incinerators and sintering furnaces which emit dioxins into the atmosphere, as well as facilities which discharge effluent containing dioxins, such as those which produce kraft pulp and sulfite pulp. In addition, revisions were made to implementation orders for laws, relating to air pollution, marine pollution and waste treatment, etc. 

Cleaning Technologies for Dioxin-Contaminated Soil

The Environment Agency of Japan invited submissions on 28 May 1999 for ideas on practical technologies that are safe and reliable for purification of soil contaminated with dioxins. Within about one month 48 submissions had been received. The following two methods were selected as practical technologies which can be proven in the field, based on criteria such as soundness of theory, safety and efficiency of purification. Testing of these methods is now being discussed with interested local governments.

(1) *In Situ* Vitrification Method

An electrode is placed in a container in the ground which holds contaminated soil. Electricity


is passed through the electrode, generating heat (1600-2000°C) which brings the soil to a molten state and thermally cracks organic compounds such as dioxins into safer substances such as carbon dioxide. Gases such as carbon dioxide produced by thermal cracking of organic compounds are collected in a cover and decomposed by a thermal oxidizer at more than 850°C.

(2) Base Catalyzed Decomposition Method

Safe alkali reagents are added to and mixed with contaminated soil. Soil is detoxified by dechlorination of dioxins in the soil by heating at 350 to 400°C in a kiln. The very small quantity of dioxins which

are not dechlorinated are collected in a gaseous state when they evaporate from the soil and liquefied by cooling. The liquid is then rendered harmless by adding alkaline reagents and heating at over 300°C.

The following four technologies were also selected as seed technologies, since they are at the final stages of development, are considered likely to find practical applications quickly, and are suitable for small-scale testing.

- i. supercritical water oxidation method
- ii. mechano-chemical method
- iii. vacuum thermal cracking method
- iv. bio-remediation method 

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Revisions of Taxes with Environmental Component

On 16 December 1999, revisions of taxes for fiscal year 2000 were decided by the government. The government has expressed the intention to discuss the use of environmental taxes to address issues such as climate change.

More concretely, for fiscal 2000, facilities which reduce dioxin emissions will be added to the list of pollution prevention facilities eligible for special depreciation, as well as for a special tax index for a tax on fixed property. Similar existing treatment for soot, dust and smoke treatment equipment will be continued. In addition, natural gas-powered vehicles which meet standards will be eligible for new tax abatement measures starting from fiscal 2001, and tax abatement from a vehicle acquisition tax under the Law concerning Special Measures for Total Emission Reduction of Nitrogen Oxides from Automobiles in Specified Areas, will be enlarged to include the purchase of vehicles which meet specified vehicle emission standards and replaced old ones. Existing tax abatement measures for hybrid (gasoline/electric) vehicles will be continued. 

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2000

April

4-6 OECD/Environment Policy Committee (Paris)

7-9 G8 Environment Ministers' Meeting (Otsu, Japan)

9-20 11th Conference of the Parties to the CITES (Nairobi)

24-5 May The 8th Session of the Commission of Sustainable Development (New York)

May

1-7 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Nairobi)

8-10 International Symposium 2000 on Groundwater, IAHR (Omiya, Japan)

15-26 5th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Nairobi)

29-31 1st Global Ministerial Environment Forum/6th Special Session of Governing Council (Malmö, Sweden)

August

31-5 Sept. ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific 2000 (Kitakyusyu, Japan)

September

3 Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific (Eco Asia 2000) (Kitakyusyu, Japan)