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The New Ministry of the Environment—Its Work and Structure

On 6 January 2001, as the Environment Agency entered its thirtieth year, the Ministry of the Environment was established to play the central role in the government's environmental policy. This change was a part of Japan's overall administrative reforms.

In January 2000, six new resource-recycling related laws were promulgated just before the creation of the new ministry, including the Basic Law for the Promotion of the Formation of a Recycling-Oriented Society. This was no coincidence. The new Ministry's tasks and structure reflect changing trends in approaches to deal with environmental issues, as seen in those new laws. Below is a brief outline of the Ministry's work and functions.

Key Points about the New Ministry

(1) REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL BURDEN

The underlying work of the environmental administration is to control various forms of waste that arise from society's activities. The governmental reforms transferred waste-related administrative responsibilities to the Ministry of the Environment. Accordingly, it now has the broader mandate in dealing with material flows from the resource extraction stage through to waste disposal.

(2) MORE ATTENTION "UPSTREAM" IN THE MATERIAL FLOW

Approaches to cope with environmental issues, including policies to deal with waste, are changing. The new focus moves beyond the past attempts to limit the emissions themselves, to promote systems that do not result in emissions. In order to change systems of production and consumption, the Ministry will develop a variety of policies and measures in collaboration with other ministries and agencies.

Functions of the Ministry

To fulfill its role, the Ministry of the Environment has been assigned the following functions.

(1) COMPREHENSIVE COORDINATION AND PLANNING

The Ministry is responsible for environmental policies of the government overall. It is to articulate a vision of sustainable society, illuminate the path and methods to progress in that direction, and propose ways to support the efforts of various social players to realize such a society.

The role of the Ministry is to reveal blueprints for environmental protection, like the Basic Environment Plan, and to promote a range of measures while gaining the cooperation of the overall population. Examples include cross-cutting rules and policies, such as

(cont'd pg.2, The Ministry of Environment)

(from pg.1, The Ministry of Environment)

economic measures like environmental taxes, the information provision and other support for voluntary efforts of industry to reduce their environmental impact, and the framework for preliminary environmental assessments.

(2) DIVISION OF DUTIES

The Ministry of the Environment shoulders overall responsibility for policies that are entirely concerned with environmental protection. However because in some areas its duties overlap with other agencies and ministries, administrative

matters have been classified into the following three categories

(a) Centralized duties


Matters entirely concerned with the environment are assumed by the Ministry of the Environment. These include regulations relating to pollution and administrative matters relating to nature conservation and waste. In addition, the protection and control of animals was transferred to this Ministry from the Prime Minister's Office.

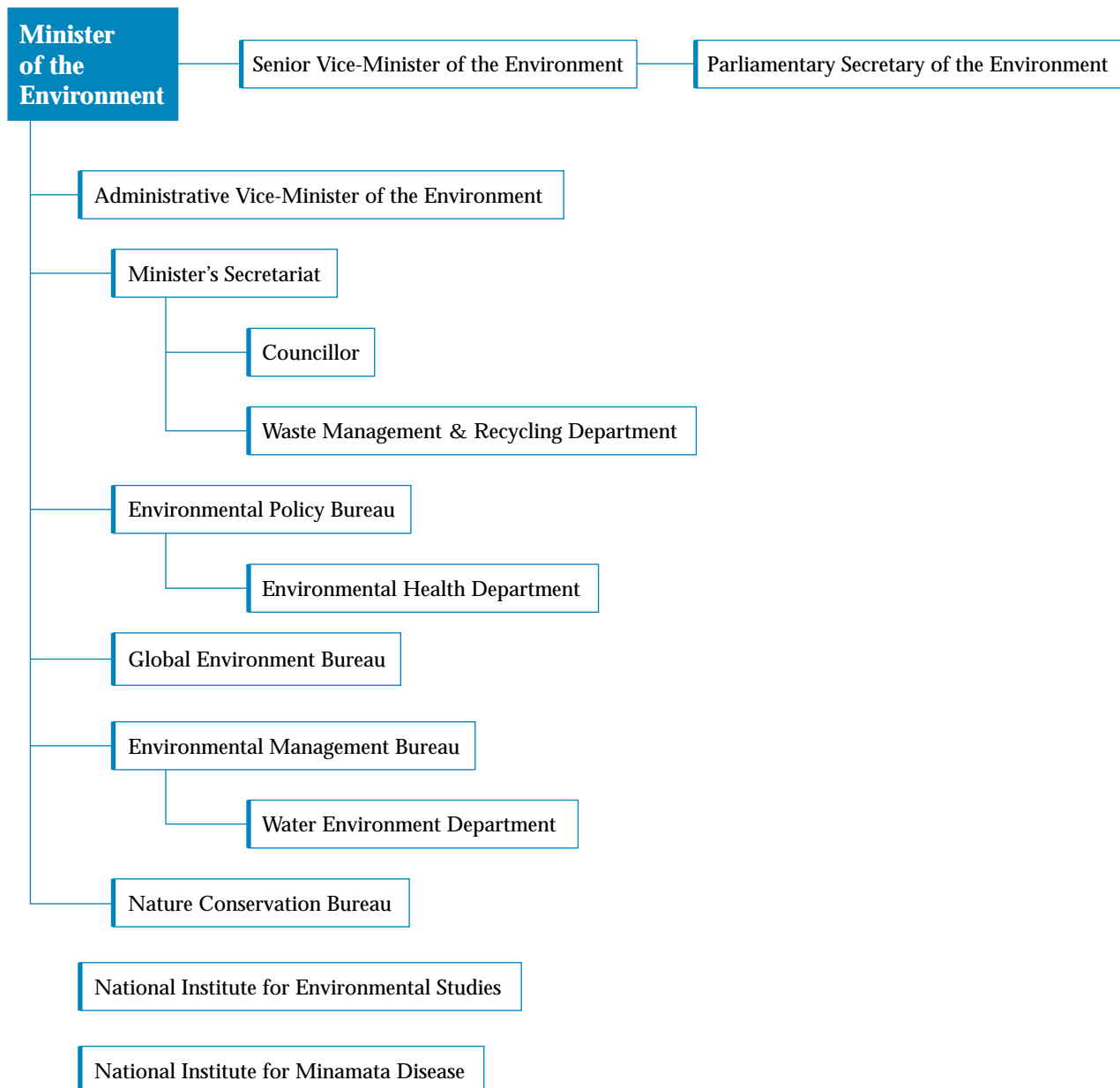
(b) Shared duties

Matters whose aims or functions are partially related to

environmental protection are shared between the Ministry of the Environment and other ministries and agencies. These include the policies that affect the upstream portion of material flows, such as screening regulations for chemical substances, recycling, etc.

(c) Recommendations

The Minister of the Environment is expected to monitor governmental matters not directly related to the environment, and make recommendations from the environmental perspective to the heads of other ministries and agencies, as the need arises. 



Revised Basic Environment Plan

Basic Concepts of the New Plan

In December 2000 Japan adopted a new Basic Environment Plan by cabinet decision. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the new Plan gives direction to the nation's environmental policies for the first half of the century. Its focuses on the goal of establishing a sustainable society, and emphasizes (1) moving from concepts to implementation, (2) ensuring the effectiveness of the plan.

The original Basic Environment Plan was drawn up in 1994 based on Article 15 of the Basic Environment Law, which outlines the general course for the government's comprehensive and long-term initiatives for environmental conservation. The introduction and four chapters of

the Plan are summarized below.

Summary of the Basic Environment Plan

INTRODUCTION

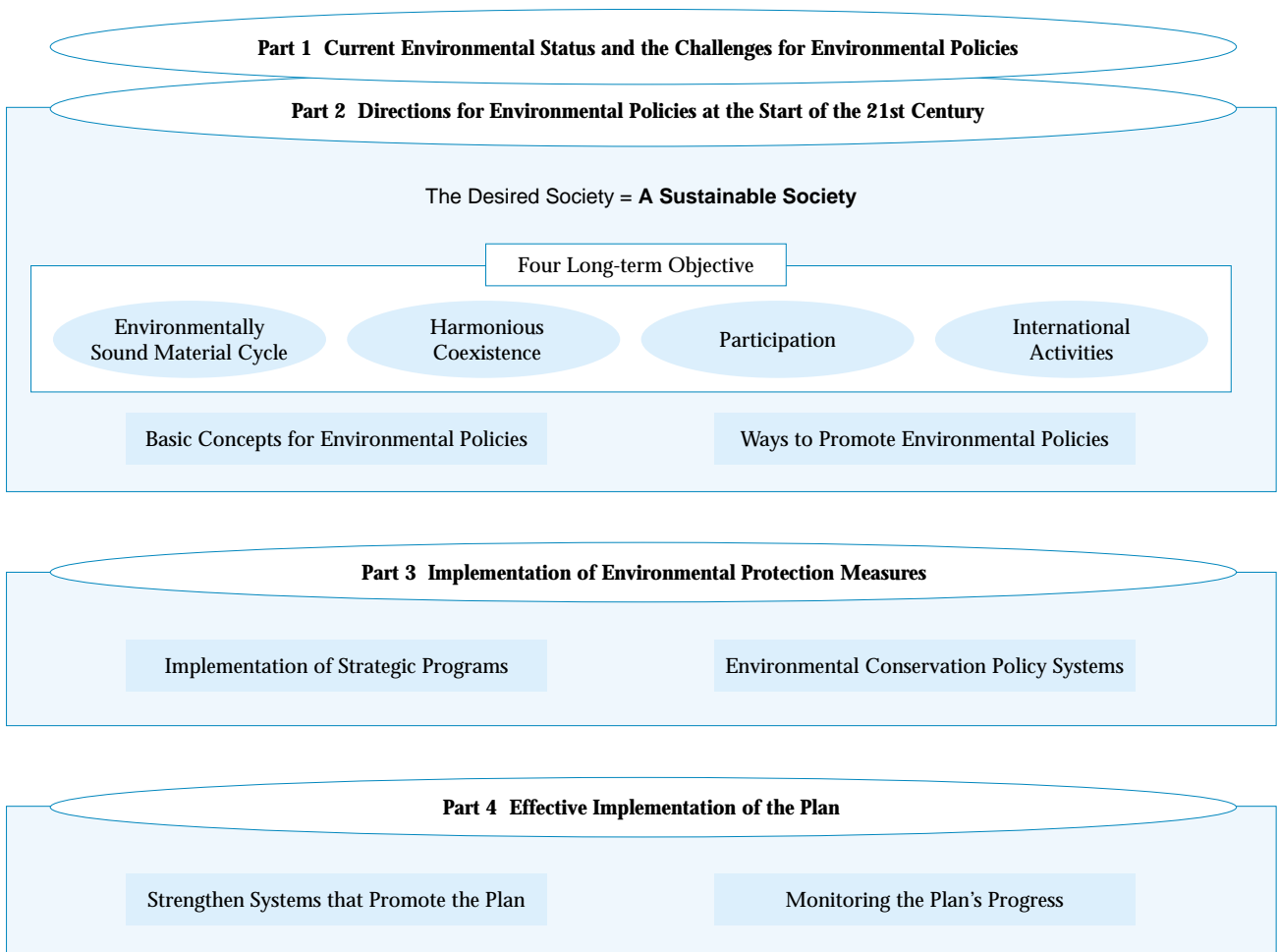
If industrial pollution could be considered to be the first environmental crisis that Japan faced, modern issues such as global warming could be considered to be the second. To deal with this second environmental crisis, we must accept that there are limits to the environment, and within these limits humanity must use the Earth's resources and energy efficiently, modify our lifestyles based on mass production, mass consumption and mass disposal, and strive to establish sustainable societies.

SECTION I. CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS AND THE CHALLENGES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

Japan has moved from industrial pollution as the main environmental problem to the issues of today—such as global warming and waste-related problems—that are caused by the lifestyles of citizens and activities of businesses. To address these problems, the challenges for environmental policies at the start of the twenty-first century are to clarify the priorities and to develop policies that are focused and effective, in order to (1) conduct consensus-building in the country to aid the establishment of a sustainable society, and through that create the situation so that heightened environmental

(cont'd pg. 7, Basic Environment)

The Structure of the New Basic Environmental Plan



Good News for Rare Bird


On 14 December 2000 the good news was confirmed that Short-tailed Albatrosses (*Diomedea albatrus*) had built nests and were brooding on Yome Island in the Ogasawara Islands (about 1000 kilometers southwest of Tokyo). This bird is a rare endemic Japanese breeder and considered an endangered species here, so the discovery is seen as a positive sign.

Until now, these birds have not been found breeding other than on Tori Island in the Izu Islands and on the Senkaku Islands to the

north of Ishigaki Island. This is the first time they have been found breeding on the Ogasawara Islands. Normally, they lay their eggs on a mound of soil and parents protect the eggs by turns for 65 days.

It is thought that some coordinated initiatives are leading to the comeback and this first nesting in the Ogasawara area. First of all, the Environment Agency and Tokyo metropolitan government have been conducting a project to protect and breed

these birds. As the result, the population of Short-tailed Albatrosses has increased to more than one thousand. In addition, the Tokyo government and other parties have driven off wild goats and tried to restore vegetation on Yome Island.

It is hoped that an albatross chick will make its first flight from the nest soon, but this had not been confirmed as of mid-March. 

2001 Survey of Common Wildlife


The Ministry of the Environment is conducting the National 2001 Survey of Common Wildlife, as a part of the larger Sixth National Survey of the Natural Environment (Green Census).

These surveys help people to develop an interest in the living things around them, and to understand nature and the importance of conservation. They also help to determine the distribution of the key indicator species in the environment and

track their changes, tasks that are difficult for a limited number of experts to handle alone.

In the 2001 survey, participants will choose accessible forests as the targets of their own observations. This year, monitoring will include dandelions and yellow flowers such as hamamelis in the spring, and cicadas and other insects in the summer. Participants will submit the results of their observations and survey sheets to the Ministry, which will have them compiled into a report in

conjunction with the results of last autumn's survey on acorns and the winter survey on red berries.

About 20,000 participants from 1,400 cities and towns in Japan joined the 2000 autumn and winter surveys. The Ministry estimates that over 300,000 people have participated since 1984. Information on present and past surveys can be found on the website of the Biodiversity Center of Japan <http://www.biodic.go.jp/>. 

Zero-emission Challenge

The Ministry of the Environment recently published the "Zero-emission Challenge Manual," targeting Japanese primary and junior high school students. The first half of this manual illustrates in an easy-to-understand format the concepts of waste reduction, re-using, recycling, and a recycling-based society, as explained by the famous Japanese cartoon character, Detective Conan. The second half includes self-diagnosis sheets and check sheets to monitor progress.

Use of the manual

The manual is designed to help


children move from concepts to action at an age when they are becoming interested in the society around them. They are encouraged to take action at home, at school and in the community. The use of the manual is envisioned as follows:

Step 1. Children understand the general concepts of waste, recycling problems, and material flows.

Step 2. They think about their current lifestyles and assess the amount of garbage produced from their homes using the "Let's Try - the Garbage Diet Challenge"

worksheets.

Step 3. They try to reduce garbage in practice using the "Garbage Diet" check sheets.

Exemplary efforts and their results will be posted on the Ministry website. This manual, entitled "*Gomi zero challenge*," is being circulated to prefectural and municipal governments facing problems with waste. It can be obtained from the Japan Environment Association, Toranomom Takagi Building 7 Floor, 1-7-2 Nishishinbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0003 

Eco Town Plan in Minamata

In February the Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry jointly recognized Minamata City for its “Eco-town Plan.”

The Eco Town Project was launched in Japan in 1997 to promote environmentally friendly communities. It is based on the “zero-emissions” concept that aims to reuse all the waste produced by certain industries as raw materials for other industries, resulting in no industrial emissions. Twelve cities and towns nationwide have been recognized for their Eco-town Plans. Minamata is thirteenth to be

recognized as an Eco-town, and on the same island of Kyushu, Kitakyushu and Omuta city in Fukuoka Prefecture have also been recognized.

Minamata suffered a bitter experience caused by industrial pollution from 1953 to 1959, which was named the Minamata Disease. Methyl mercury in industrial waste water created diseases of the nervous system and resulted in many deaths. In an effort to move on from the past, in 1992 Minamata made an Environmental Model City declaration and since then the townspeople, companies and

government have been working together to tackle various environmental problems. One example is the collection of refuse that is sorted into 23 categories. Work has culminated in the Minamata Eco-town Plan which aims creating a resource recycling-oriented society. An industrial park is the target area of this plan, with an environmental technology center as its core. The plan supports companies in the recycling of waste produced in the area, and the setting up of a comprehensive recycling center that aims at linking together industries related to recycling. 

Guidelines for Governmental Green Purchasing

On 2 February 2001, the Basic Guidelines for the Promotion of Procurement of Environmental Products, etc., were approved by a cabinet meeting. They will go into effect on 1 April this year. The creation of these basic guidelines represents the first time in the world that a green procurement system for governmental agencies is launched based on a law.

JEQ reported previously (Vol. 5 No. 2) on Japan’s new Green Purchasing Law after it was passed in May 2000. The law states that a cabinet decision is to establish basic guidelines to promote the procurement of environmental goods by the government (i.e., the national Diet, all ministries and agencies, and the courts) as well as by independent and special administrative agencies.


The guidelines cover 101 product and service items in 14

categories, including construction materials for public works projects and administrative work. Compared to similar initiatives in the past, these guidelines have greatly increased the number of items targeted. An annual review of the product list will be conducted to take into account new developments and advances in scientific knowledge. The guidelines include the following three sections.

- (1) *Basic approach*: Background and significance of governmental green procurement under the new law, and Japan’s basic approaches to promote it.
- (2) *Details*: Detailed lists of the specified items, e.g., the paper category (office paper, printing paper, etc.), writing tool category (pens, pencils, etc.),

and equipment category (chairs, desks, etc.). Also, product evaluation criteria, and information on how to promote procurement of these items.

- (3) *Other important information*: The infrastructure needed to promote green procurement in government, how to publicize procurement guidelines, how to compile and release the results, etc.

The objectives and actual results of the using the basic guidelines are to be made public. It is hoped that they will help to enhance the greening of government procurement, and by promoting recycling and expanding the market for environmental products and services, provide an impetus to the greening of Japan’s society and economy. 

Chemicals in the Environment

In December, the Environment Agency (the Ministry of the Environment at present) released the year 2000 edition of “*Kagaku busshitsu to kankyo*”, known as the “Black Book.” This is the annual report of surveys about chemical substances, compiled by the Environmental Health and Safety Division. The report was first published in 1974. The 2000 edition covers the results of four surveys.

The surveys provide important information that allows the government to know the state of pollution from chemical substances, develop monitoring regimes for early detection of problems, design preventive measures, and develop appropriate policies and countermeasures. Below is the gist of the 4 surveys covered in the report.

1. 1999 FISCAL YEAR COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES ON ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY

This survey consists of comprehensive measurements including the residual levels in the environment of chemical substances. There are 3 components of the survey.

(a) Environmental survey

This is a survey of the residual levels of a total of 42 substances in the general environment (water and air).

Environmental survey (water sediment fish)

Target substances: 24 substances and groups including benzene [a] anthracene

Media: water quality, sediment, fish

Survey sites: 56 locations nationwide

Results: 8 of the target substances and groups were detected in water, 20 in sediment, and 12 in fish.

Environmental survey (air)

Target substances: 26 target substances and groups including PCBs
Survey sites: 15 locations nationwide.

Results: 25 of the target substances and groups including PCBs were detected.

(b) Monitoring of bottom sediments

Target substances: 20 substances including p,p'-DDT

Survey sites: 18 locations nationwide

Results: 19 of the substances were detected, except α -HCH.

(c) Monitoring of indicator species (biological monitoring)

Target substances: 24 substances including PCBs

Targets of surveys: 8 species of fish, 2 of shellfish, and 2 of bird, at 20 locations nationwide.

Results: 13 substances detected in fish, including PCBs and p,p'-DDE, 8 substances detected in shellfish, including p,p'-DDE and trans-nonachlorol, and 5 substances detected in birds, including PCBs and p,p'-DDE.

2. 1999 FISCAL YEAR SURVEY OF DESIGNATED CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES

This survey studies the situation of residual levels of designated chemical substances in the environment as well as exposure routes to humans.

(a) Survey of environmental residual tendency

Target substances: 10 substances including chloroform

Survey sites: water quality and sediment at 36 locations nationwide, atmosphere at 31 locations.

Results: Excluding 4,4'-diamino3,3'-dichlorodiphenyl methane, 9 of the substances were detected.

(b) Survey of exposure routes

This survey covers exposure routes to humans through different media (indoor air, food, etc.)

Target substances: 6 substances including chloroform

Target site: 3 households each in 8 regions of Japan

(c) Results:

6 substances were detected in indoor air, 3 substances were detected in food (chloroform, trichloroethylene, tetrachloroethylene).

3. 1999 FISCAL YEAR ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY OF ORGANIC TIN COMPOUNDS


Target substances: tributyl tin compounds, triphenyl tin compounds
Survey targets: wild life monitoring (fish, shellfish, birds), designated chemical substances (water quality, sediment)

Results: Residual levels of tributyl tin compounds, and triphenyl tin compounds are found widely in the environment. Pollution levels of tributyl tin compounds in organisms and water are improving, and remaining constant in sediment. Levels for triphenyltin are improving in water, improving or unchanged in sediment, and unchanged in organisms.

4. 1999 FISCAL YEAR FOLLOW-UP SURVEY ON THE STATE OF CHEMICAL POLLUTANTS PRODUCED UNINTENTIONALLY

Target substances: brominated dioxins

Survey targets: sediment and wild life

Results: Brominated dioxins were detected in some sediment samples. However, further consideration of the analytical methods is required, including decomposition, identification, quantification, etc., before a final determination can be completed. 

(from pg.3, *Basic Environment*)

awareness leads citizens and industry to take concrete actions, and (2) to shift the socio-economic system and lifestyles toward patterns that place less of a burden on the environment.

SECTION II. DIRECTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AT THE START OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In order to establish a sustainable society, the Plan repeats the same four long-term objectives as in the original Basic Environment Plan:

“environmentally sound material cycle,” “harmonious coexistence,” “participation” and “international activities.” The basic direction is to use integrated approaches that take into account both economic and social factors, with the recognition that the environment is the basis for the existence of life. The Plan refers to the “polluter-pays principle,” “eco-efficiency,” “precautionary approach” and “environmental risk,” and seeks to eliminate the negative environmental inheritance on future generations caused by pollution from hazardous substances, etc.

In order to make these approaches more concrete, and to apply environmental consideration in every aspect of socio-economic activity, policies should involve the participation of all players in society, and integrate environmental

consideration everywhere from the local to the global level.

SECTION III. SPECIFIC IMPLEMENTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION MEASURES

Chapter 1. Implementation of strategic programs

The Plan focuses on the following eleven strategic programs to use limited resources carefully and efficiently.

Environmental Issues (per field)

- (1) Promotion of Measures to Prevent Global Warming
- (2) Efforts to Obtain a Sound Material Cycle and to Fashion a Society with an Environmentally Sound Material Cycle
- (3) Efforts Toward Reducing Traffic-Related Environmental Loads
- (4) Environmental Conservation Efforts to Secure a Sound Water Cycle
- (5) Promotion of Countermeasures for Chemical Substances
- (6) Efforts for Conservation of Biodiversity

Political Measures

- (7) Providing Environmental Education and Learning
- (8) Efforts to Create a Greening Mechanism for the Social Economy

- (9) Promoting Environmental Investment


Efforts from All Stages

- (10) Promoting Efforts for Community Improvement
- (11) Promoting International Contribution and Participation

Chapter 2. Environmental conservation policy systems

This chapter exhaustively describes the major concrete policies and measures for the promotion of Basic Environment Plan.

SECTION IV. EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN


The Plan also points the future direction of efforts, including guidelines for environmental consideration in each ministry and for introducing environmental management systems in the government. The Plan calls for the development of the appropriate systems to monitor progress, including ways to analyze and evaluate how each ministry's policies and measures benefit the environment. In addition, the results of deliberations of the Central Environment Council are to be reflected in the government's Annual Report on the Environment. Finally, costs for the environmental conservation are to be forecasted and reflected in the budget each fiscal year. 

Eco-Friendly Natural Gas Buses in Tokyo

The Pollution-related Health Damage Compensation and Prevention Association launched a new publicity initiative involving the operation of environmentally friendly buses that run on compressed natural gas (CNG). The Association did this as part of their environmental conservation activities, in cooperation with the Tokyo metropolitan government,

the Energy Conservation Center and the Tokyo Gas Company. These buses are the first of their kind to be operating on regular routes in Japan, and they are wrapped in colorful ads carrying environmental messages. The test period for this campaign ran from 1 February until the end of March.

The buses were covered in one of three environmental messages:

“Let's ride buses and trains!”
“Let's use low-emission vehicles!”
and “Do it now! Stop idling your car engine!” The slogans are intended to promote the use of public transportation, the popularization of low-emission vehicles and environmentally friendly driving. 

Corporate Environmental Reporting Guidelines: New Edition


As part of the Ministry of the Environment's efforts to promote corporate environmental reporting, in February it announced a new edition of the Guidelines for the Environmental Reporting. This 2000 fiscal year edition is the output of a committee created last autumn to revise the guidelines, and includes consideration of public comments received on a draft version.

One important aspect of policies needed for a society and economy that places the minimum burden on the environment is encouraging businesses to make voluntary efforts to protect the environment. To achieve this, it is important that corporations release environmental reports, and that they include information about their policies, plans and specific initiatives to reduce their burden on the environment. In addition, corporations can improve their activities if they have more communication with consumers, investors, customers, local residents and other stakeholders. And they should be properly recognized for their positive efforts.

However, while some larger corporations are releasing environmental reports, this is still a very new trend. Easy-to-understand and proper guidelines are needed for the principles of reporting and contents of reports, and how to make the reports readable. These are the reasons why the Environment Agency published the first version of the Guidelines in June 1997.

However, during the ensuing years, a number of important changes have occurred. First, more companies are publishing environmental reports (increased from 170 companies in 1997 to 270 in 1999). In addition, third-party reviewers (e.g., new ecological mutual funds) are now evaluating the environmental performance of corporations based on the information from the corporate reports. Finally, progress is being made at the international level. For example, last year an international organization, Global Reporting Initiative, released a set of guidelines for environmental reporting, and the International Organization for Standardization recently established the ISO 14031 standards (on environmental performance evaluations).

The revised Japanese Guidelines contain new examples of outstanding environmental reports and expand on the overall contents, but the main changes from the previous edition are (1) the addition of information about the essential elements and principles of environmental reports and frameworks to ensure credibility, and (2) inclusion of detailed examples and calculation methods for environmental performance indicators, which show progress in reducing the environmental burden of corporate activities.

The Ministry plans to popularize these guidelines to corporations as well as people who will read their environmental reports. It will exchange information with corporations by explaining them to the Environmental Reporting Network and the Study Group for Corporate Practitioners of Environmental Accounting. It hopes to have more producers and users of environmental reports using these guidelines, and to get feedback from them. 

For more information about events and articles in JEQ please contact the Global Environment Bureau.

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2001

April

4-6 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 17th general meeting (Nairobi, Kenya)

7-8 The 3rd Tripartite Environment Ministers meeting among Korea, China, and Japan

16-27 The 9th Session of Sustainable Development (New York, U.S.A)

May

16 OECD/Environment Policy Committee at Ministerial Level (Paris, France)

July

2-4 OECD/Environment Policy Committee/Working Party Protect Environment

16-27 COP6, UNFCCC (SBSTA14 SBI14) (Bonn, Germany)

August

The 11th Asia-Pacific Seminar on Climate Change (Kitakyushu, Japan)

September

24-29 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 18th general meeting (London, UK)

October

15-19 6th International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant (Minamata, Japan)

29-3 Nov. 31st International Tropical Timber Organization (Yokohama, Japan)