

Tougher law to curb water pollution

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BEIJING – China's top legislature on Thursday adopted an amended water pollution law that toughens punishment of company officials through hefty fines.

The revised Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law was passed at the 32nd session of the Standing Committee of the Tenth National People's Congress (NPC), which concluded here on Thursday.

The law, with eight chapters and 92 provisions, will take effect on June 1.

"Enterprise heads directly responsible for causing severe water pollution incidents and others with direct responsibility will be fined up to half of their income of the previous year," said the law.

Enterprises would be held responsible for 30 percent of the direct losses of any serious water pollution incident they cause and 20 percent for incidents of medium consequences.

Previously, corporate executives faced only administrative penalties.

"The amount of fines should be imposed according to the severity of violations, and too little money cannot effectively tackle the long-standing problem of 'low violation cost'," said a statement of the NPC's Law Committee issued in December.

The law also stipulated that the country would set up its water protection goal as well as an assessment system, which would be applied to local officials.

Whether they reach the goal will be directly connected with their performance evaluation, according to the law.

It allows environmental protection departments and relevant social organizations to support water pollution victims in lawsuits and the government encourages law firms and lawyers to provide legal aid to the victims.

It added a provision to stipulate that the aquaculture industry should properly use nutrient feed in a bid to prevent over-nutrition.

Water pollution is among the top environmental concerns of the Chinese government and the public.

A 2006 survey found that surface water generally was classified as containing intermediate levels of pollution, but one third of the 744 samples tested were graded at the worst pollution rating.

The State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) handled 161 emergency environmental pollution incidents in 2006, of which 59 percent involved water pollution.

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