

Environmental watchdogs to sharpen teeth

The top environmental watchdog has published a plan to give muscle to the country's monitoring capacity from 2006 to 2010.

The plan was jointly developed by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the Ministry of Finance.

It would require about 15 billion yuan in investment, of which, 7.8 billion yuan would come from the national treasury. The rest would come from local governments and companies.

According to the general plan for environmental protection over the next five years, the country would spend about 35 billion yuan on the capacity building of environmental agencies. Accounting for more than 40 percent of the total input, improving supervision plays a big role in sharpening the teeth of environmental watchdogs.

Wu Shunze, member of the plan's writing group and a researcher with the Chinese Academy for Environmental Planning, said the top priorities are developing an advanced environmental-quality monitoring and warning system, and enhancing environmental law enforcement.

It maps out 13 top tasks for the coming years, including strengthening emergency-response capabilities, supervising nuclear and radioactive materials and solid wastes, protecting natural reserves and furthering environmental research.

"The plan emphasizes establishing the hardware needed by environmental monitors," Wu said.

"Currently, some environmental watchdogs' toolboxes aren't sufficiently stocked."

For example, some staff lack access to vehicles to travel to the sites of industrial accidents where they should provide immediate response.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection recently issued equipment lists for local environmental protection bureaus at different levels and would ensure the lists are filled, Wu said.

However, Wu added equipment supplies are only a base; figuring out how to make best use of these tools would be the next step.

Source: China Daily