Environmental pollution tied to economic boom: NGO

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By Lin Meilian

Health problems triggered by environmental pollution have been increasing in recent years, according to a recent NGO report.

The report, the Green Book of the Environment 2010, was released by the Beijing-based Friends of Nature (FON), which said such problems are related to the economic boom.

The report cited several high-profile incidents last year and pointed out that environmental problems have become increasingly easier to spot while public health incidents reached a peak.

For example, more than 200,000 people in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province experienced a water shortage after a local chemical plant polluted the city's drinking water source in February.

About 615 children living near a local smelter in Fengxiang, Shaanxi Province tested positive for excessive lead in their blood in August.

The incidents attracted nationwide attention.

Managers were detained and plants were shut down.

"In 2009, many hidden environment-related health problems began to become public, it is the result of long-term accumulation," said Yang Dongping, chairman of FON.

The NGO report blamed the high number of incidents on lax enforcement of laws and not enough funds for environment protection.

China's GDP has been growing by over 10 percent a year but environmental protection gets only 1.4 percent of the GDP, the report said.
The report referred to unidentified experts who suggested the amount should be raised to 2 percent in order to match the nation's economic boom.

The report also said China's environmental protection laws are adequate but lacks efficient implementation.

Yang also pointed out that the public knows more now about such issues that in return has urged authorities to pay more attention to the environment.

He cited local authorities in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province who relied on public opinion before it proceeded to address the waste problem.

To address the health hazards stemmed from pollution, the report suggested more attention should be paid to public health and the public should be given more information.

Zhang Zhongmin, deputy director of Hebei Environment Federation and the founder of Green Friend Association, an NGO that is working on local conservation, told the Global Times Sunday that the country's medical study on environmental-related health problems was far from enough.

"People and doctors have not paid much attention to environment-related health problems until recent years," he said. "And only a few scholars are studying this field."

China has taken steps to phase out heavy polluters as the government recognizes the importance of protecting the environment while boosting economic development.

Premier Wen Jiabao said at UN's Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen last December that China has made great efforts to fight against climate change through pollution reduction, including phasing out backward production facilities that cause heavy pollution.

http://china.globaltimes.cn/society/2010-03/514740.html