

Toilet revolution improves health

Guideline released by eight departments urges stronger fiscal support for sanitation campaign

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Getting up from a new toilet, Xu Meixiang simply pushed a button to flush everything in the bowl down the drain. The tank then refilled with fresh water for the next user.

While that is an everyday scene for urban residents, it was of novelty in 49-year-old Xu's home village of Dahuping in Huoshan county, Anhui province, a few months ago after its toilets were rebuilt or renovated to include such sanitary devices. The new toilet was built with the aid of government subsidies to free Xu's family from mosquito bites in summer and frozen bottoms in winter.

They and 20 neighboring families were the latest beneficiaries of the toilet revolution campaign in the mountainous county last year. A new round, currently underway, will help another 50 village households.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and seven other Central government departments released a guideline last week to promote a special action plan for the campaign in rural areas. By 2020, all toilets for rural families in eastern China and suburban areas in the central part of the country should be renovated or rebuilt, with human waste properly disposed of, the guideline said. In other parts of central China and in the west of the country, around 85 percent of families should be using sanitary toilets by then.

The guideline urged stronger fiscal support for the campaign and said farmers should rebuild or renovate their toilets of their own free will. It encourages all families in each village to accomplish such renovation together.

The toilet revolution campaign was originally proposed by UNICEF to improve children's welfare worldwide.

For decades, many people in China, especially in far-flung areas, used unsanitary open-air toilets that were a breeding ground for diseases such as malaria. Mosquitoes and flies were often seen around the toilets used by Xu and her neighbors.

China has committed itself to improving sanitation in urban and rural areas. Since 2015, the country has accelerated the campaign in tourism sites and its vast rural areas. Government subsidies for building a new toilet or renovating an old one range from 1,000 yuan (\$148) to 4,000 yuan, depending on the local government's fiscal status. Xu's family built the new 20,000 yuan toilet together with the families of her three siblings. They split the bill and the local government provided an 8,000 yuan subsidy after it was completed.

"Surrounded by flies and mosquitoes in summer, going to the toilet used to be distressing," Xu said. "Now, the new facility can get us away from those insects and 'doing the business' is kind of enjoyable and a real relief."



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

More than 200 million farmer families live in more than 550,000 villages in China, and that makes building or renovating their toilets a huge task, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Han Changfu said in October.

He said the toilet revolution is vital to improving living conditions for rural residents and enhancing their sense of happiness, adding

that nearly half of the country's farmer families have already renovated or rebuilt their toilets.

Undisposed human waste from toilets and unhygienic drinking water are responsible for about 80 percent of the spread of epidemic diseases in rural areas, said Zheng Fengtian, a professor of agriculture and rural development at Renmin University of China.

The toilet revolution is a fundamental way to improve health conditions for rural residents by effectively reducing the possibility of being infected with such diseases, he said.

For example, in Jiangxian county, Shanxi province, the campaign replaced more than 60,000 old-fashioned toilets that had no water to flush, and reduced the incidence

of infectious intestinal diseases among farmers by 46 percent in 2016, Zheng said.

In addition, the campaign can boost investment in infrastructure, including water supply, electricity and roads, in rural areas and the development of rural tourism, which is helpful to improving the health and living conditions of farmers, he said.

Policy digest

Nonprofit community kindergartens promoted

The authorities will promote nonprofit and inexpensive kindergartens affiliated to urban residential communities, a guideline issued last Tuesday said.

Issued by the General Office of the State Council, it targets problems in the planning, construction, transfer and operation of pre-schools affiliated with urban communities.

It stipulates that urban communities that do not have their own kindergartens or those with an insufficient number of kindergartens will have to build or fund new ones.

Under the guideline, existing community-affiliated kindergartens should be handed over to local education and administrative authorities to be turned into public or inclusive private ones. Such kindergartens should be nonprofit, it said.

The guideline also set a schedule for efforts to rectify problems. Local authorities should complete a thorough investigation of kindergartens affiliated with urban communities before the end of April, and then come up with rectification measures.

A task force will be set up for the campaign, involving officials from the State Council, the Ministry of Education and several other ministerial-level departments.

The guideline also called for better coordination among different departments to ensure the rectification of existing problems. Individuals found to be derelict in their duties or who have violated laws and disciplinary requirements will be punished in accordance with the law, it said.

10-city pilot program to curb solid waste

The State Council, or the Cabinet, has launched a 10-city pilot program to reduce and better recycle solid waste, according to a notice published by the General Office of the State Council on Jan 21.

The notice is aimed at promoting the reduction and recycling of solid waste in cities so that landfills can be minimized and the environmental impact of solid waste can be reduced to the lowest possible level.

The notice said the pilot program does not mean there will be no solid waste generated in such cities, nor will there be total recycling of solid waste. Instead, it refers to the notion of city management requiring long-term exploration and practice.

The program will target big solid waste problems and illegal landfills, and identify weak links and key procedures in the generation, gathering, transfer and disposal of solid waste in cities.

According to the notice, by 2020, an index system, an integrated management system and a technical system for the program will be established, and significant progress should be made in key areas in the pilot cities.

The notice emphasized giving play to the role of government and refining the statistical system for solid waste. It also stressed the importance of advocating green industrial production, especially in the mining sector, to enable the recycling of solid waste from mines in pilot cities by 2020.

The standards system will be further refined to better address the recycling of bulk industrial solid waste, the notice said.

It also underlined the importance of promoting green production in the agricultural sector to promote recycling its waste.

A green lifestyle will be promoted among the general public to reduce sources of everyday garbage.

The production, sale and use of non-degradable plastic bags and plastic tableware will be restricted, and green packaging materials will be promoted in the express delivery sector, the notice said. The authorities will also implement a mechanism to charge residents based on the weight of their daily garbage, and the recycling of construction waste will be advanced.

Subsidies will be offered for the recycling of animal waste and crop straw as organic fertilizers, the notice said, adding that incentives will be provided for new business models and technologies for the recycling of solid waste.

The pilot program will start in the first half of this year and end by 2021.

XU WEI

POLICY RESPONSE

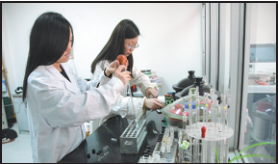
Lab safety, holiday fire risks and recycling on agenda

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Several ministry-level departments, including those for education, civil affairs, and emergency management, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

University laboratory overhaul targets safety

University laboratories across the country will be overhauled to ensure the safety of faculty and students, the Ministry of Education said in a notice published on Friday. The move follows an explosion and fire at a laboratory at Beijing Jiaotong University on Dec 26 that claimed the lives of three graduate students.



In the notice, the ministry demanded checks of the supervision and management systems for laboratory hazards and risks at universities across the country.

Universities should have round-the-clock and all-around control over laboratory hazards and risks during procurement, transportation, storage and use of dangerous goods and hazardous substances and waste disposal, the ministry said.

Laboratory safety facilities and related guarantee systems should be overhauled to ensure that essential safety facilities and equipment function effectively and sufficient funds are invested in safety, it said.

The ministry also required universities to educate teachers and students about laboratory safety, including the relevant laws, regulations and rules.

Two unregistered NGOs banned after investigation

Two illegal social organizations and their affiliated bodies have

been banned after an investigation found they were unregistered, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said on Wednesday.

The ministry said one of the illegal NGOs operated and organized activities in the name of pushing forward civil-military integration as it conducted research trips to businesses and hired staff. Its actions severely damaged the reputation of the country's national strategy of furthering integration between civil and military sectors.

The other NGO, which called itself the China History Education Commission, conducted fraud and profited by pretending to promote traditional Chinese culture, it said.

Civil affairs authorities at all levels should step up efforts to ban similar illegal social organizations to protect the public's interests, the ministry said.

Over 1,800 NGOs have been banned nationwide as part of a national campaign targeting illegal NGOs, the ministry said.

Forest fire alert ahead of Spring Festival holiday

The Ministry of Emergency Management has called upon local authorities to stay alert for forest fires during the Spring Festival holiday from Feb 4 to 10.

In a notice published on Friday, the ministry warned of increased forest fire risks during the festival period due to tomb sweeping activities that usually involve offering sacrifices to ancestors by burning incense. Some forests and grasslands were vulnerable to fires, with more extreme weather like droughts and gales forecast during the holiday period, the ministry said.

Forest fires have been reported in Liaoning, Yunnan and Sichuan provinces this year, and the minis-



try has launched a campaign to detect hidden risks that might cause forest fires.

Recycling of lead-acid batteries to be stepped up

China will step up recycling of lead-acid batteries to boost environmental protection, according to an action plan issued by nine government departments.

The action plan, launched by departments including the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, said the country is aiming to recycle 40 percent of lead-acid batteries by 2020 and 70 percent by 2025 to tackle environmental pollution caused by such batteries.

The authorities will come up with a list of key lead-acid battery producers before June and make the list public to promote green production of the batteries. A mechanism for the pooled recycling of discarded lead-acid batteries will be piloted, and violations of laws involving such batteries will be stringently targeted, the work plan said.