

POLICY REVIEW



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Medical waste disposal capacity boosted

Wuhan had to handle over 200 tons a day at peak of coronavirus outbreak

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China has unveiled a plan to bolster its medical waste disposal capacity in the next two years, with steps to build more facilities and expand existing ones, after the novel coronavirus outbreak left many cities overloaded with such refuse.

The action plan, jointly published by the National Development and Reform Commission, the National Health Commission and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment on May 3, says major cities should have ample capacity to handle medical waste in times of emergency by 2022.

Every prefecture-level city must set up at least one integrated facility before the end of this year, with every county required to establish a collection, transfer and disposal system for medical waste.

The plan said China's distribution

of medical waste disposal capacity is regionally unbalanced, with problems in some places including aging facilities and inappropriate disposal standards.

The novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic placed a strain on cities' capacity to dispose of medical waste, with Wuhan, the Chinese city hit hardest by the disease, seeing its medical waste increase from 40 metric tons a day to over 200 tons at the peak of the outbreak.

Zhao Qunying, head of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment's emergency response office, told a news briefing in March that 22 cities had been overloaded with medical waste and facilities in another 28 cities were at full capacity.

The country was able to properly dispose of 4,902.8 tons of medical waste a day before the outbreak, but that had been increased to 6,114.8 tons a day, the ministry said in a statement issued on Wednesday.

“The cost of disposal and the amount of investment required to build new facilities for medical waste is much higher than for other solid waste.”

Ma Jun, director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs

According to the action plan, local authorities must conduct a comprehensive survey of facilities before the end of this month and then come up with plans to optimize the distribution of facilities.

Large cities must assess their disposal capacities and take the potential growth of medical waste and emergency scenarios into account before planning, designing and building new facilities, it said.

It also highlighted the importance

of renovating existing facilities to expand their capacity and ensure they can meet standards.

The action plan is part of a broader effort to boost China's medical waste disposal capacity.

A revision to the Law on the Prevention and Control of Solid Waste Pollution, passed on April 29 by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, included specific items on tightening the management of medical waste, especially during major disease outbreaks. The law now stipulates that governments at the county level and above must increase their capacity to dispose of medical waste, and authorities at various levels must allocate special funds for the handling of hazardous waste in the event of a major outbreak.

Ma Jun, director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, a Beijing-based nonprofit environmental research organization, said disposing of medical waste placed a lot of demands on funding, technologies and urban planning, which was why many cities lacked sufficient capacity.

“The cost of disposal and the

amount of investment required to build new facilities for medical waste is much higher than for other solid waste,” he said. “Many communities are also unwilling to have such facilities located nearby.”

The novel coronavirus outbreak had highlighted the lack of capacity in many large cities, and the gap could be even bigger in some small cities and rural areas, Ma warned.

But it would be costly to maintain a large disposal capacity on a regular basis, he said, and the key for authorities to cope with a major shortage in the event of an outbreak was to have sound contingency plans. In the meantime, it was also important to ensure that private businesses played a role, as the huge medical waste disposal market had high technical and funding thresholds, he said.

“The market for disposing of medical waste is far from being sufficiently competitive and there are some gray areas and natural monopolies,” Ma said.

“It's important to ensure the market can play a decisive role in the allocation of resources.”

POLICY RESPONSE

Insurance refunds and e-commerce on agenda

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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for human resources and social security, agriculture and rural affairs, and culture and tourism, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

**Businesses benefit from 42.3b yuan in refunds**

A total of 42.3 billion yuan (\$5.98 billion) in unemployment insurance premium refunds has been distributed to 3.2 million enterprises across China with 85.13 million employees, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said on Wednesday.

Three times as many companies have received refunds this year than last year, with a growing number of small and medium-sized enterprises among them, the ministry said.

The novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic has seen local authorities adopt multipronged measures

to ensure the refund can be paid to companies facing difficulties and help them resume work and production, it said.

The measures included taking the initiative to contact enterprises and notify them about the policy, reducing the number of documents required for applications, and conducting online approvals.

**100 counties experiment with online produce sales**

China will explore new models of e-commerce through social networking and livestreaming to promote online sales of agricultural produce, a guideline published on Thursday said.



The guideline, jointly issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and three other departments, called on 100 counties to experiment with the “internet plus selling” of agricultural produce from villages to cities. The experiment is aimed at exploring and establishing a batch of promotion modes and standard specifications that can be repeated and applied nationwide, it said.

Those responsible for the online sale of agricultural produce in counties taking part in the experiment should strengthen cooperation with online sales platforms, open online stores on large e-commerce platforms, open up marketing channels and promote cooperation with fresh food e-commerce companies.

Targeted, low-cost e-commerce training should be provided in a simple way to farming households whose produce had distinct advantages and characteristics but had not been included in the supply chain, it said.

Ministry to select new national tourist resorts



The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has begun selecting a new batch of national tourist resorts in a move to provide the public with high-quality tourism products.

The candidate tourist resorts should have sound public information services and nationwide popularity, according to a recent notice issued by the ministry. It said candidates should have recorded no serious violations of laws and regulations or serious travel-related accidents in the past three years.

Tourist spots should be recognized as provincial-level resorts for more than a year before applying for national-level status, it said.

Statistics from the ministry show

that China now has 30 national resorts and 453 provincial resorts.

**Preferential VAT policy extended to end of year**

The preferential value-added tax policy for small-scale taxpayers has been extended to Dec 31, the State Taxation Administration and the Ministry of Finance said in an announcement published on Thursday.

The VAT policy was originally put into effect from March 1 to May 31, according to an earlier announcement from the two ministries.

The measures are slightly different for taxpayers in Hubei province, the Chinese region hit hardest by the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic.

Small-scale taxpayers in Hubei will be exempted from paying VAT on sales subject to a 3 percent VAT levy, and they will not have to prepay VAT on items subject to a pre-levy VAT rate of 3 percent.

In other regions, small-scale taxpayers will see the 3 percent rate for both reduced to 1 percent.

Policy digest

Support for enterprises to help protect jobs

China will step up efforts to support enterprises and protect jobs by unveiling new policies and improving existing ones, according to an executive meeting of the State Council on Wednesday.

The meeting, presided over by Premier Li Keqiang, heard reports on the implementation of policies and measures to support the resumption of work and production and bail out enterprises.

Thanks to the positive effect of 90 new policies, work and production were returning to normal, some difficulties faced by companies had been addressed, and the economy and society were getting back to normal, the meeting said.

To maintain solid economic fundamentals, it emphasized the importance of focusing on “six priorities”: safeguarding employment, people's livelihoods, the development of market entities, food and energy security, the stable operation of industrial and supply chains, and the smooth functioning of society.

Policies that have been introduced to support businesses, especially micro-sized, small and sole-proprietor ones, should be fully implemented to benefit them better, secure job positions and minimize the impact of the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic on the employment and income of migrant workers and others, the meeting said.

The meeting also called for domestic demand to be boosted as a matter of strategy and for multiple steps to be taken to drive consumption.

To reinforce weak links exposed by the response to the pandemic and vulnerable areas of socioeconomic development, the meeting decided that efforts should be made to accelerate the construction of major projects set out in national plans, effectively utilizing investment allocated from the central government budget and local government special bonds.

It also urged continued efforts to improve the business environment, including updating the negative list on market access and removing hurdles to market access faced by private firms, especially micro-sized, small and medium-sized enterprises, to boost effective investment from the private sector.

46 e-commerce zones win Cabinet approval

The State Council, China's Cabinet, has approved the establishment of integrated pilot zones for cross-border e-commerce in 46 cities and regions, including the Xiongan New Area, according to a circular published on Wednesday.

As required by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, the new zones should draw experience from existing zones to drive industrial upgrading and transformation, boost brand building, and propel cross-border e-commerce across the board, so as to stabilize the fundamentals of foreign trade and investment and promote the high-quality development of trade, it said.

The development of pilot zones should be well regulated to guarantee national security, internet security, the quality of imported and exported goods, and effectively prevent transaction risks.

The circular also said that a fair and sound business environment should be created for various market entities.

For orderly development, the circular required local governments to employ an innovation-driven model where the market can play a decisive role in resource allocation, and make new breakthroughs in improving mechanisms for cross-border e-commerce and related systems.

State Council departments should strengthen coordination, guidance and policy support for the integrated pilot zones and consider incorporating cities with eligible zones into the pilot program on retail e-commerce imports, it added.

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