

POLICY REVIEW

Green facilities top goal of guideline

Environmental infrastructure development seen as key in urban and rural areas

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China has set in motion a new set of policy measures to shore up the development of green urban infrastructure, pledging to develop a system of facilities that can better treat and monitor sewage, garbage, and solid and medical waste through 2025.

A guideline published by the National Development and Reform Commission and three other central government departments earlier this month highlighted the need to accelerate the growth of environmental infrastructure in urban areas and further modernization.

The measures marked the latest efforts to scale up investment and stabilize growth, as environmental infrastructure remains a bottleneck in national green development, analysts said.

According to the guideline, China will promote the integrated, smart and green development of environmental infrastructure and extend the infrastructure network from urban areas to rural townships and villages as it strives to improve the environment and contribute to national goals of peaking carbon dioxide emissions and carbon neutrality.

It set out a host of major targets for the development of the infrastructure, pledging to add and renovate a total of 80,000 kilometers of sewage pipes and guarantee that over 95 percent of wastewater nationwide will be treated before discharge by 2025.

Key measures include developing and improving the sewage network in urban villages, shantytowns, suburban areas and townships.

The capacity to treat household and solid waste will also be bolstered by steps like enabling the recycling of over 60 percent of household waste by 2025.

Zhao Yunhao, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Environmental Planning, said the latest policy measures will strongly contribute to the national fight against pollution while further unleashing the market potential for infrastructure development and the growth of the environmental protection sector.

He cited official figures that showed that 4.8 trillion yuan (\$758.7 billion) was spent on treating pollutants during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) period, and sales volume from environmental protection industries reached 1.95 trillion yuan in 2020.

He estimated that industries treating water pollution and solid waste and that engage in environmental monitoring could be worth 2.58 trillion yuan by 2025.

Another of the document's highlights is the proposed digitalization and green transformation of urban environmental infrastructure, which will help align environmental protection sectors with emerging technologies like big data, the internet of things and cloud computing.

The treatment of hazardous waste, especially medical waste, is a major



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focus of policy measures as the COVID-19 epidemic has led to mounting disposal challenges for discarded facial masks, protective gowns and gloves.

An official with the Ministry of Ecology and Environmental Protection said the government is aiming to ensure that every county develops its own system for the collection, transportation and treatment of medical waste before the end of June.

The ministry said in December 2020 that the national capacity to treat medical waste had risen by 27 percent since the onset of the epidemic.

To further enhance the capacity to handle hazardous waste, the guideline called for the construction of a host of

regional treatment centers, including six focusing on the control and prevention of hazardous waste, and 20 dealing with especially unsafe materials such as medical waste.

China will also accelerate the development of a national information management platform as part of broader efforts to modernize the treatment of medical waste.

The government will encourage the use of energy-saving and low-carbon technologies and techniques during the infrastructure development process and promote the green growth of sectors devoted to the recycling of resources.

Some analysts have highlighted the significance of developing urban infrastructure and facilities that can

accommodate the growing demand for garbage sorting in the near future. Zhang Yingjian, an analyst of resources and environmental sectors at the China International Engineering Consulting Corporation, said the management of household waste is challenged by associated procedures, including collection, transportation and treatment.

He noted that the latest policy measures called for the development of a national sorting system that carries out these procedures by categorizing the waste.

Megacities including Beijing and Shanghai have already come up with regulations mandating garbage sorting. In Beijing, authorities can impose fines for violations — from

1,000 yuan to 50,000 yuan on organizations, and from 50 yuan to 200 yuan on individuals.

Tong Lin, head of the environmental sanitation engineering technology center at the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, said trash sorting must be given greater priority, and local authorities must clarify targets and tasks and ensure implementation while bolstering the development of facilities.

Tong said it is important for authorities to move forward with the development of facilities to treat kitchen waste, including the use of proper technologies and treatment methods, and replace landfills with more environmentally friendly practices like incineration.

New measures to ensure food security, help farmers

By XU WEI

China has unveiled a master plan for the modernization of the agricultural sector and rural areas through 2025, as the government ratchets up measures to ensure food security, helps farmers bolster incomes and consolidates the outcomes of its poverty reduction campaign.

The plan, published by the State Council — China's Cabinet — on Feb 11, highlighted the need to ensure national food self-sufficiency and involve small farmers in modern agricultural practices.

Key goals include steadily improving grain production capacity and maintaining annual grain output at a level higher than 650 million metric tons.

To improve quality, efficiency and competitiveness in the agricultural sector, the central government will enforce the protection of arable land and push forward the creation

of high-quality farmland, the guideline said.

Zheng Fengtian, a professor of rural development at the Renmin University of China, said the document has made ensuring food security a top priority to further the growth of the agricultural sector.

He explained that the national demand for staple foods will continue to rise in the near future, and thus there could be no complacency in grain production.

Zeng Yande, head of the development and planning department at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, told a news conference in December that agricultural technology, especially seeding technology, remained the most important solution to increasing output, as the improvement of varieties was the most significant factor in the increase in crop yields in recent years.

The guideline also highlighted challenges that must be addressed,

including the large area of degraded farmland, a lack of innovation in seeding technology and excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides that have resulted in pollution in rural areas.

With the aging of China's rural population, the guideline also stressed the importance of bridging the income gap between rural and urban residents and strengthening rural infrastructure and public services.

With over 500 million of the nation's more than 1.4 billion population still living in rural areas, Zheng said a key policy objective is to narrow the gap in public services — including education, healthcare and elder care — between urban and rural areas.

In this regard, the policy document outlined measures such as bolstering access to preschools, strengthening the rural healthcare system and developing a tiered aged care network in counties,

townships and villages.

Services catering to children, women, seniors and the disabled will be reinforced, and more social workers will be encouraged to provide assistance.

The improvement of the environment in the countryside is another policy priority, as the guideline pledged to renovate more toilets for rural families in western and central regions.

The treatment of sewage and household garbage will be pushed to improve the sanitation levels in such areas.

Liu Huanxin, head of the National Administration for Rural Vitalization, told a news conference in December that China has renovated the toilets of over 40 million rural households since 2018 — when a three-year action plan was launched — and close to 70 percent of rural households now have access to hygienic toilets.

To usher in a green, low-carbon

transformation in the agricultural sector, the government will gradually phase out the use of pesticides with high toxicity and encourage the use of green technologies instead. The circular use of waste from agricultural production, such as feces from livestock farms and paddy straw, will be encouraged.

Zheng said the alignment between the poverty alleviation campaign and the rural vitalization strategy is another highlight of the document, as preventing the recurrence of poverty remains a daunting task in the common prosperity drive.

"As the common prosperity drive is scaled up, the most difficult part lies in rural areas. Thus, there is still immense work to be done to consolidate the outcomes of poverty alleviation and enable rural residents to live better lives," he said.

The guideline stressed the need to ensure the stability of policy packages for groups that have been lifted out of extreme poverty and come up with more refined aid mechanisms, including expanded social aid programs and preferential support policies.

Policy Digest

Support goes to real economy sector

The National Development and Reform Commission and 11 other departments jointly issued a notice on Friday to consolidate the development of the industrial economy and maintain its growth this year.

The notice, issued to provincial-level authorities as well as the ministries and institutions of the State Council, China's Cabinet, asked them to offer micro, small and medium-sized enterprises more tax deductions for equipment, extend policies that allow deferred payments of certain taxes by MSMEs in the manufacturing industry and lower the rate companies pay for their employees' unemployment insurance and employment injury insurance.

Authorities should also devise favorable policies for the real economy, push major State-owned banks to allocate more economic capital to the manufacturing industry and promote the rapid increase of mid-to-long-term loan offerings being made to industry companies.

The notice asked authorities to make effective use of the 200 billion yuan (\$31.6 billion) in funds earmarked for the clean and efficient utilization of coal, and stabilize the price of iron ore and chemical fertilizer as well as launch campaigns to promote the development of the photovoltaic industry and speed up major infrastructure projects, such as 5G construction.

Authorities should encourage financial institutions capable of offering services overseas — under the premise of legality and controllable risks — to strengthen support for traditional foreign trade companies, cross-border e-commerce platforms and logistics companies in the construction and use of warehouses abroad.

The notice also requested authorities increase the number of trains on the China-Europe Railway Express, help companies expand exports via the railway and take measures to support the manufacturing industry in attracting foreign investments.

Also on Friday, the commission jointly issued another notice with 13 other departments to facilitate aid for the service industry to help it recover from difficulties related to the pandemic.

Quality growth sought for fishing industry

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs issued a guideline to promote quality development of the country's distant water fishing industry during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period on Feb 14.

The production of fish and marine products should reach about 2.3 million metric tons annually by 2025, the guideline said, calling for strict control of the number of boats and improving equipment.

It also asked relevant authorities to stabilize the number of distant water fishing companies; improve their quality and efficiency; reduce violations and accidents; increase the ability to survey sea fishery resources globally; and improve implementation of international conventions.

The guideline laid out specific requirements for the trawling of tuna and squid, as well as the development of biotic resources in the Arctic and Antarctica.

It called for consolidating traditional cooperation with West Africa and Southeast Asia and promoting ties with East Africa, the South Pacific, Latin America, West Asia and South Asia.

Additionally, the guideline asked authorities to encourage distant water fishing companies to develop a supply chain covering trawling, cultivation, processing, cold chains, delivery and marketing through mergers and cooperation.

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