

Future Plan of Environmental Policy in Korea

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Introduction

Korea Ministry of Environment (KMOE) has so far focused its environmental policies on control of single media such as air, water quality, wastes, etc., but the environmental plans and policies have revealed various contradictions and problems because those plans were not taken into consideration their health impacts. On 20 March 2004, 'Department of Environmental Health Policy' was established within the KMOE to handle the environmental health policies for the next decade. Thus, the focus of environmental policies is expected to shift timely from media to receptors.

In particular, the impacts of diverse environmental contamination need to be reviewed through assessment of ecological and health effects, and thereby, environmental criteria and environmental-friendly regions need to be set appropriately. This presentation describes past, present and future conditions of environmental contamination in Korea and thereupon, reviews the 10-year plan of environmental health published recently and thereby, discusses some desirable counter-measures.

Establishment of organization and legislation

Until March 2004 when Environmental Health Policy Department was established under Environmental Policy Bureau, Korea Ministry of Environment, there had been no authority handling the environmental health problems,

Thus, environmental policies had been little systematic or well-schemed, much less the environmental health taken into consideration; they had focused primarily on

troubled regions and case-by-case *post hoc facto* survey on health impact. Namely, the bureaus responsible for each media - Air Quality Preservation Bureau, Water Quality Preservation Bureau and Resources Cycling Bureau - controlled environmental contaminants and various harmful chemicals in terms of their impacts on health.

Since mid-1990's, environmental health researches began to be conducted from an academic perspective, but they focused on integrated control of the substances harmful to endocrine organs or environment as well as development of control systems. Even worse, such fragmental health impact researches were poorly fed back into policies.

Namely, the conventional environmental policies were focused only on control of media of air, water and soil, assuming that people's health and ecosystem should be protected.

Since 1980's, most of developed countries began to explore the ways to solve both environmental contamination and citizens' health, and later, many nations centered about EU members began to push forwards environmental health policies as core of their environmental policies.

In Korea, as citizens are more and more aware of the environment due to their improving living standards, many studies into correlations between environmental contamination and diseases are increasing, while the conventional policies controlling the environmental media are deemed to have limited effects. After all, the environmental health problems emerge as an important issue for environmental policies.

An environmental health policy focuses on protection of 'receptors' - people and ecosystem - rather than substances and media. Namely, it is required to set new environmental criteria for protection of people and ecosystem, especially vulnerable and sensitive to environmental contamination, which will replace the conventional *post hoc facto* control of discharged contaminants.

Accordingly, environmental health policies aim to minimize the population vulnerable to environmental contamination through scientific assessment of health risks, while surveying the diseases caused by environmental contamination,

monitoring and controlling the pollution and constructing a public basis for environmental health.

Since 2004, experts and government authorities have been deliberating on a 10-year plan of environmental health polices, and they are considering having 'Environmental Health Promotion Code' enacted in 2005, based on those (draft) policies. In short, environmental health policies are being developed on a full scale.

Ten-year plan for environmental health policy

The ultimate goal of the 10-year plan for environmental health policy is to minimize the population with their health threatened by environmental contamination and thereby, position Korea as world top ten best environmental health nations by 2015.

In addition, the plan also aims to establish a preemptive environmental contamination prevention system whereby environmental diseases can be monitored and alerted.

The specific policy directions of this 10-year plan can be enumerated as follows;

- Minimization of the population vulnerable to environment contamination into an advanced nation's level
- Reinforcement and resetting of the environmental criteria in view of citizens' health protection
- Survey of the health risks caused by environment contamination and establishment of a special organization thereof
- Enactment of Environmental Health Code supporting the environmental health policies
- Construction of an integrated information system controlling harmful chemical substances and environmental diseases

- Arrangement of systems and mechanisms assuring citizens of their rights to be engaged and informed

As action strategies for above goals, 'three-fold preemptive environmental health strategies' will be selected to develop core challenges for each area.

All in all, the 10-year plan aims to construct a comprehensive environmental health policy basis whereby the population susceptible to environmental contamination could be reduced with environmental diseases surveyed/prevented/controlled to minimize the population with environmental health risks as well as environmental health diseases.

Summary

In 2005, the KMOE and an advisory members for environmental health policy are exploring new environmental policy directions in the 21st century by suggesting a 10-year plan of environmental health policy with its specific goals, grounded on four basic principles: preemptive environmental control instead of post hoc facto control of environmental contaminants or discharged substances, receptor-centered approach, priority on protection of the people vulnerable and sensitive to environmental contamination, and warranty of citizens' rights to be engaged and informed. Such new policy challenges in the area of environmental health, which must be significant in view of important policy shift for environmental health in the 21st century, is expected to conduct to improvement of environmental health in Korea and Northeast Asian Regions as well.