

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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## President's Message

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Environmental issues know no boundaries. Most situations are not only interdisciplinary but international in scope. The National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) publishes its China issue recognizing that environmental issues know no boundaries and that environmental professionals can learn from both the problems and the opportunities found in other nations.

Perhaps the most well-known infrastructure project is the Three Gorges Dam, which impounds the Yangtze River in Hubei and is now the world's largest hydropower project. The Three Gorges Dam and the Gezhouba Dam were barriers to the Yangtze finless porpoise, Chinese river dolphin, and Chinese paddlefish, the latter two of which are now believed to be extinct. The Yangtze soft-shell turtle is extinct in the wild. The last paddlefish was caught in 2003, and the last sighting of the river dolphin was in 2004. Reservoir issues include algae blooms, sedimentation, and schistosomiasis (snail fever).

China continues to embark on ambitious water projects. Perhaps the largest is the South-to-North Water Transfer Project, which is intended to address the severe water shortages in the North China Plain, an area encompassing the Beijing and Tianjin municipalities. The rapid growth of Beijing and Tianjin, together with agricultural irrigation through intensive groundwater pumping in the Hai River basin, has led to the shortages. Components of the transfer

project include pumping stations and channeling structures along the Yangtze and Han Rivers.

A well-publicized water-quality problem involves Tai Lake, which has become infamous for its pollution, because it causes blue-green algae blooms. During the summer, the shallow lake turns pea green as the algae thrive on a mix of industrial, farm, and municipal effluent. Since a bloom in 2007, hundreds of small chemical and manufacturing plants have been forced to relocate, and strict effluent controls were instituted. The goal is to restore the fisheries in the lake, as well as the suitability for a drinking-water source.

Just as infamous is the town of Guiyu in eastern Guangdong, where electronics waste is recycled. At one time, as much as 70% of the world's electronics waste was imported into China, and much of it ended up in villages in southern China. The process of smelting the waste to obtain gold and other precious metals produces lead, dioxins, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, brominated fire retardants, and polybrominated diphenyl ethers.

It is encouraging that China has an environmental impact assessment (EIA) law, and that this law allows public participation in project decision making. Without public participation, EIA lacks a social component and decisions are not based on full knowledge of all environmental considerations. The public is necessary for accountability and transparency, offering local knowledge. The result is a better-informed government, as well as a better-informed citizenry. The EIA process can be used to anticipate, avoid, modify, and compensate

for environmental problems such as those just mentioned.

Because environmental laws force agencies to stop and think, the laws are often under attack for slowing things down. Too much process or bureaucracy can occur, but without environmental studies and public consultation, too little can also occur. Neither too much nor too little bureaucracy is the problem. Achieving balance is the problem. Achieving better decisions is the goal.

About five years ago, NAEP revisited its mission statement and vision and came up with the following:

Our mission is to be the interdisciplinary organization dedicated to developing the highest standards of ethics and proficiency in the environmental professions. Our members are public and private sector professionals who promote excellence in decision-making in light of the environmental, social, and economic impacts of those decisions.

Our vision is to:

- Be the primary source of unbiased information on environmental practices
- Support the advancement of the environmental professions as a whole and our individual members in their careers
- Encourage better decision-making that thoughtfully considers the full implications of those decisions

All of us—agencies, applicants, and environmental professionals—must keep the mission and vision in focus to achieve a better decision that takes into account economic, social, and environmental implications.