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Increasing efforts in improving water and air quality from the governments of Chengdu and its neighboring cities make the region a better place to live.

Chengdu joins neighbors to protect environment

Cities work on pollution controls, other initiatives

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Eight cities in Sichuan province will act in concert to improve the environment, according to a plan recently released by the local governments.

They include the provincial capital Chengdu and the cities Deyang, Mianyang, Suining, Leshan, Ya'an, Meishan and Ziyang that surround it.

The region has been named the Chengdu Plain Economic Zone and is home to 40 percent of the population of Sichuan. It is the most developed region in

the province and has the best natural resources.

The new plan is designed to promote joint efforts among the cities in a broad range of issues including environmental protection, economic development, infrastructure construction and public services.

It is the latest milestone in long-established cooperation among the cities and is expected to deepen their collaborative relations, said officials.

According to the new plan, the cities will jointly implement projects in forestation, sewage treatment and air pollution control with the target

of building a "green shelter" in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River.

They will also start regional disposal centers to collect and process medical and other hazardous wastes.

The governments also plan to establish a system to facilitate information sharing and joint law enforcement on environmental regulations.

Cross-regional water resource protection has long been an important item on the agenda of cities on the Chengdu plain.

Water protection

Last year, the Mapengyan Canal in Deyang was designated a secondary source of drinking water for the Qingbaijiang district in Chengdu.

"It is not a simple move, but

requires big compromise and sacrifice by the city of Deyang," said an official at the Chengdu City Environmental Protection Bureau.

He said companies that discharge sewage into the canal have to be shut down or removed to enable the water to meet drinking standards. As well, environmental appraisals for new companies are stricter.

Deyang is located upstream of Chengdu along the Tuojiang River. Last year, the city government completed 70 pollution-control projects to make sure water quality meets drinking standards.

The government of Chengdu also undertook a wide range of efforts to regulate and remove polluters in its jurisdiction along the Tuojiang River. The



A worker is cleaning the Huanhua Stream in Chengdu.

95 pollution-control projects started last year are continuing along with 39 projects added this year.

Mingshan county in Ya'an is located upstream on the Baizhang River, which flows to Pujiang county in Chengdu. A communication link was established between county governments to enhance the

supervision of companies along the river. When a polluter is found they "quickly respond and solve the problem", said officials.

The environmental bureau in Meishan downstream of Chengdu on the Fuhe River is working to share information and jointly protect the water supply.

Controlling and preventing air pollution is another important task that requires collaboration among cities, said local officials.

Officials have been cooperating since last year in efforts to control PM2.5 emissions caused by crop stalk burning, coal burning, industries and automobile exhaust.

City officials solve a burning issue

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Chinese farmers often burn crop stalk after harvest to clear the fields for the next planting, but the tradition is a major cause of air pollution in both rural and neighboring urban areas.

However, the situation has been changing in Chengdu and its neighboring cities in recent years.

Officials from Chengdu, Deyang, Mianyang, Meishan and Ziyang agreed at a conference last year to cooperate in prohibiting burning to clear fields.

"While making meteorological observations we can easily find the unusual burning site on the Chengdu plain and such information will be shared among the five cities," officials said then.

At the conference, they also agreed to share technologies and experience in helping farmers recycle crop stalk.

An official from the Chengdu Agriculture Committee said that the city plans to recycle 94 percent of the stalk this year.

In April officials from the five cities met again and discussed continuing the collaboration.

They said cooperation has been effective, with not a single day in the last harvest season causing pollution in Chengdu.

Lai Shijiu, an official in the Qingbaijiang district in Chengdu, is a witness of this positive change.

He has been working to stop the burning of leftover stalks in crop fields since 2009.

Every year from April to September the administrative researcher from the local agriculture committee had to travel across towns and villages to inspect whether the farmers are burning stubble leftover from the harvest.

Lai said that 2013 was a "watershed" in his work with the governments of Chengdu, Deyang and several other neighboring cities starting to cooperate in prohibiting the burning.

"Before that, the efforts were somehow in vain," he said.

He still remembered clearly that in May 2012, the entire Qingbaijiang district was covered by black smoke. He

brought some colleagues to visit every village in his jurisdiction but found no fires. Later they discovered that farmers in the neighboring city of Guanghan were burning large fields.

But at that time they could do nothing about it, Lai said.

The situation changed in 2013 when the local governments established a way to jointly prevent and control stalk burning.

Lai said when a burning site in a neighboring city is now discovered, they can easily contact the person in charge and put out the fire as soon as possible.

"We are not only supervising but also learning from each other," Lai said, citing the example of subsidizing inspectors that they learned from the Guanghan city government.

He said that previously the leaders in towns and villages were not enthusiastic about inspecting stalk burning as they had their own work in the daytime and often had to patrol after work.

Learning from the experience of Guanghan, the gov-



Cycling along the green paths in these Chengdu Plain cities reflects the locals' new pursuit of a healthier and more environmental-friendly lifestyle.

ernment of Qingbaijiang district now offers a subsidy of 150 yuan per hectare to town-level and village-level governments for inspections. Special groups were then set

up in many towns and villages to supervise the response and publicize knowledge of recycling crop stubble.

Handouts to farmers from local officials include a recy-

cling guide, and the contact information for several companies that purchase and recycle stalks.

In addition, the city government of Chengdu started

to implement a penalty on stalk burning this year. Local officials said that the farmers have to pay more than 1,000 yuan (\$160) for setting fields on fire.