

JUNE 2009

FORUM FOCUSES ON VIETNAM ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

WASHINGTON DC. Vietnam's environmental issues were the focus of a forum at the Ronald Reagan Building International Trade Center on May 28th, 2009 sponsored Washington Laboratories and AmericanTCB.

Ambassador Le Cong Phung provided opening remarks on the state of US-Vietnam relations at the event titled: "Environmental Business Opportunities in Vietnam." Speakers from the US State Department, US EPA, NOAA, the US-ASEAN Business Council, and private interests gave specific insight into the state of Vietnam's environmental challenges and ways that US technologies and methods can be applied to ameliorate these problems.



Ambassador Le Cong Phung

This forum is a continuing effort by Washington Laboratories to reach out and engage Vietnam's standards and regulatory interests and to focus on the opportunities for US interests to help overcome Vietnam's challenges. Previous conferences, held in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City focused on Food and Electrical Safety as well as Energy Efficiency.

As a relatively new member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Vietnam has been opening its markets and increasing transparency in trade. The expansion of Vietnam's GDP (expected to double in the next ten years) is straining its resources and affecting air and water quality in an acute way.



Michael Violette,
CEO of
Washington
Laboratories stated
that. "Our work has
proved that
Vietnam is open,
eager for
engagement and is
ready to work with
US interests in
addressing the



needs of their populace. Old enmities are cast away and hope for a new level of cooperation benefits all parties."

Peter Gourlay, President of the Maryland-Asia Environmental Partnership and co-organizer of the event echoed those sentiments, stating "With our long legacy of involvement and recent engagement at the highest levels of government, it is a prime time to work with the public and private sector on addressing Vietnam's critical environmental needs. This forum is a positive step to identify needs and opportunities."



One clearly astonishing figure is the growth in trade between the US and Vietnam. Since 2001 and through 2007, bi-lateral trade has increased by 900%. The accession to the World Trade Organization has further opened the trade picture. A large part of this trade is based on the success of standards in the process, which is due in large part to Vietnam's openness to engage US standards experts and cooperate in forming a transparent system as it develops. According to **Mary Sue Shore** of the US-ASEAN Business Council, "Increased pressure is now being placed on policy makers to draft regulations that encourage better, less-polluting technologies and products. There is a marked increase in environmental awareness among the public and policy makers."



Mary Sue Shore

Other speakers provided a detailed focus on several specific projects and their direct experience in supporting Vietnam's efforts to form the country in a sustainable way.

Al Goodman of Camp Dresser and McKee gave an overview of the Thu Duc Water Quality Improvement Project, a 26km water pipeline that will bring fresh water to parts of Ho Chi Minh City. The project: A \$90M effort that involves CDM, local contractors and local officials. Mr. Goodman gave an overview of lessons-learned, some observations on overcoming obstacles (such as crossing the Saigon River) and the skew between US practice and local practice with respect to worker safety.



Al Goodman

Dianne Rossiter, Country Manager of the Southeast Asia region with the US Trade and Development Agency gave an overview of the activities between the US and Vietnam and USTDA's role in supporting trade with that country. On the environmental front, overall, since 1981, USTDA has funded nearly 900 environmental activities with the environmental sector being the second-largest

funding target. Ms. Rossiter reminds us that environment is treated as a cross-sector often combined with agriculture, energy/power, and transportation. They are inextricably linked.

Elise Owen, Senior Manager for International Policy for the American National Standards Institute gave a presentation on experience developing a program to update and support the development of standards with a view on the US' market-based approach to standards and conformity assessment. ANSI has held in-country workshops designed to support STAMEQ's effort to bring Vietnam's regulatory structure to meet WTO requirements.



Elise Owen

Alex Koff, Partner at Whiteford Taylor Preston, gave a poetry-inspired perspective of Vietnam's long history and the recent implantation of programs under the framework of the World Trade Organization. According to Mr. Koff, "Vietnam's environment is under considerable stress from rapid economic growth, urbanization and rising human pressure on relatively scarce natural resources. While it has gradually improved its environmental regulatory framework, Vietnam has very limited capacity for implementation." It is implementation wherein there is opportunity.



Alex Koff

Representing the US Environmental Protection Agency, Mr. **Peter Banwell** gave an overview of the EPA's myriad of partnerships and projects. Focusing on Vietnam in particular, he pointed out that landfill issues loom large as the pace of development and urbanization has out-run the ability to develop and implement effective waste disposal systems. The greenhouse gas emissions generated

by landfills, which otherwise vent methane to the atmosphere, can be captured and used to generate energy. Mr. Banwell states that “the World Bank has provided \$21 million to develop affordable pollution control methods for livestock waste management in Vietnam.” It is a drop in the bucket, but it is at least going in the right direction.



Peter Banwell

Tony Hoang of Meiwah International provided an overview on Sustainable Development in Vietnam. He provided an overview of the 17 August 2004 Decision No.153/2004/QD-TTg issuing the Strategic Orientation for Sustainable Development in Vietnam. The Decision outlines Vietnam's anticipated path with priority economic areas for sustainable development, priority social areas for sustainable development and priority areas in natural resource utilization, environmental protection and pollution control for sustainable development. Echoing Mr. Koff's comments, Mr. Hoang stated challenges for implementation of these goals, including lack of technical and institutional capacity, overlap in duties and institutional gaps, limited monitoring and valuation systems and general issues developing sustainability awareness in Vietnam's populace and in her institutions.



Tony Hoang

Vance Hum, President of IMSG, gave an overview of climate change issues and the particular case of Vietnam, where much of the country is near or at-sea level. A rise in ocean levels of a few meters will inundate many of the major seaport cities. IMSG supports the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) programs for developing climate change models. Given that the rise in base temperatures may be already past a tipping point, many of the efforts involve mitigation. IMSG's efforts include developing a hazard risk management for climate change adaption which leads with an

emphasis on modernizing technologies, adapting coastline infrastructure and developing human capital for sustainability.



Vance Hum

Following Mr. Hum's remarks, **Jonathan Justi** of NOAA/NOS International Program Office gave an overview of the cooperation between NOAA and Vietnam. In the area of climate change, a mechanism for the exchange of information and development of science to address the issues are under the US-Vietnam Science and Technology Agreement. This has led to specific collaborations between the US and Vietnamese official in the areas of information exchange, ecosystem studies and predictions and awareness training. Specific areas of support from the US include: sustainable aquaculture, marine protected area management, use of geographical information system, oil spill response and remote sensing imagery of marine areas.



Jonathan Justi

Certainly, meeting the needs of an environmentally-sensitive country such as Vietnam will need to draw on an array of expertise and require the implantation of multiple strategies. The May 28th Forum was a step towards connecting solutions to the challenges; Washington Labs and the Maryland-Asia Environmental Partnership appreciates the contributions from the Speakers and sponsors.

Next Steps

Further to that aim, Washington Laboratories and the Maryland-Asian Environmental Partnership plan to return with selected experts to Hanoi in the fall for **The 2009 Hanoi Climate Change Forum**. For more details on this event, contact Mike Violette mikev@wll.com or 240 401-1388.