



GOINGS ON

RFF Scholar Discusses Public Participation in Environmental Policymaking in China

RFF visiting scholar Ruth Greenspan Bell recently spoke in five Chinese cities about how public participation, a component of effective U.S. environmental policymaking, could affect China's developing environmental regulatory system. As a guest of the Speaker Program of the U.S. Department of State, Bell spoke in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Beijing, and Shanghai. In some cases, she spoke to large groups, but most of the smaller sessions were informal, functioning as mutual learning sessions with Chinese environmental professionals.

In her more formal presentations, Bell discussed the advantages of public participation, an evolving issue in China. She explained how the environmental public interest community and other interested members of the U.S. public, through lawsuits and pressure, gave content to environmental impact assessment following the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in 1969. China has environmental impact assessment requirements in its laws, as do many countries, but Chinese environmental officials would like to find ways to better integrate the findings of these assessments into the decision process on large-scale development projects.

More and more, high Chinese government officials, such as Vice Premier Wen Jiabao, are stressing the importance of integrating environmental concerns into economic development, and mobilizing common participation as part of the process. In her discussions with environmental protection officials, students, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the Chinese environmental press, Bell



RFF visiting scholar Ruth Greenspan Bell and Mark Canning, counselor for Press and Culture with the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou, visit a local environmental newspaper.

approached public participation as an aspect of pragmatism. She discussed how involving the public can help environmental regulators obtain useful and necessary information to improve regulations and make them more realistic. She also explained that a public process could help build public trust, an important factor in establishing the legitimacy of new requirements.

China is one of the world's fastest growing economies. Because economic development has traditionally been considered a greater priority than environmental protection, a range of development-related environmental problems has emerged. In fact, six of the world's ten most polluted cities are located in China. Bell reports, however, that there has been increased emphasis on the environment throughout China, apparently sanctioned by the government. *The China Daily* prints environmental stories almost daily. And in Guangzhou, Bell visited an environmental newspaper and a training school for environmental monitoring.

Even though environmental law implementation remains poor and economic development still receives priority attention, there are some signs of change, Bell says. In Beijing, a Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims has been established in the China University of Political Science and Law. The Center conducts interdisciplinary research on environmental law, arranges training for enforcement and court officials, and provides legal assistance to protect the environmental rights and interests of pollution victims.

The May 16 *New York Times* reported on one of the Center's cases, in which compensation was sought for a farmer who lost several hundred of his ducks as a result of pollution from an upstream business. Although the suit is not yet resolved, it is considered important in the effort to improve the implementation of many relatively new Chinese environmental laws. Bell hopes that the Center's recent legal action is an example of China's gradual movement toward a rule-of-law society. 🏠



GOINGS ON

Kyoto Protocol Negotiators Discuss Compliance Options at RFF/CIRED Workshop in Paris

RFF and the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CIRED) recently sponsored an international workshop to explore concerns about the potentially high costs of achieving the Kyoto targets along with the related issue of incentives for long-term technology development. Attendees at “Compliance and Supplementarity in the Kyoto Framework” included senior negotiators of the Kyoto Protocol along with various nongovernmental experts from both developed and developing countries. The workshop was held near Paris in late June.

Discussions centered on two new policy papers developed by U.S. and French researchers. The first, by RFF scholars Raymond Kopp, Richard Morgenstern, and William Pizer, addressed concerns expressed in the United States and elsewhere that the binding emission limitations contained in the Protocol may prove to be very costly to implement. In the second, CIRED director Jean-Charles Hourcade focused on whether excessive reliance on emissions trading and other flexibility mechanisms may discourage the long-term development and diffusion of new, environmentally friendly technologies. CIRED, the French national scientific research institute, has played a prominent role in climate change debates, particularly in Europe. This was the third joint RFF/CIRED workshop on climate change issues held over the past two years.

The RFF researchers proposed adding to the still-evolving Protocol a mechanism that would allow countries to make a pre-determined compliance payment in lieu of pursuing excessively costly emission reduction options. The revenues from this compliance payment would be used to




RFF/CIRED workshop participants included representatives from Brazil, China, England, France, Germany, and the United States.

reduce additional emissions worldwide via a transparent auction mechanism. Despite the potential for relaxation of the Kyoto targets, the authors argued that adoption of the compliance payment mechanism would increase the likelihood of timely ratification and successful implementation of the Protocol.

Workshop participants noted a certain symmetry between the RFF researchers' focus on cost containment and Hourcade's concerns that the costs may be too low to provide adequate long-term incentives for development of new technologies. In the context of the proposed cost cap, discussions focused on the possibility of limiting the use of sinks and so-called “hot air” in the first budget period, adoption of various indicators of domestic action, and mechanisms for accelerating the development of firm commitments for the second budget period and beyond.

Both papers and a summary of the discussions prepared by workshop co-chairs

Hourcade and Morgenstern are available on *Weathervane*, RFF's Web site devoted to climate change issues (www.weathervane.rff.org). A second session of the RFF/CIRED workshop is planned for September, just before the next round of international climate negotiations. The 6th Conference of Parties will be held in The Hague this November.

The RFF/CIRED workshop series is supported by generous grants to RFF from the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Wallace Global Fund for a Sustainable Future. Melissa Dann, Wallace Global Fund senior program officer, attended the workshop and said it was very interesting to watch the participants wrestle with the pros and cons of the compliance approaches outlined by the RFF and CIRED researchers. “What was especially impressive was RFF's genuine interest in exploring alternatives, making it a more honest broker in the eyes of the participants.” 



GOINGS ON

New RFF Project to Examine Electronics Disposal Management Practices

The growing importance of information technology to the world economy and to consumers in the United States and other developed countries has brought about a surge in demand for electronic equipment. According to recent estimates, shipments of personal computers in the United States grew from over 10 million units in 1992 to over 30 million units in 1997. Advances in computing technology are continuing to develop at a rapid pace, and, consequently, the useful life of electronic equipment tends to grow shorter with each successive generation. For example, in 1997, the average life span of a desktop personal computer was four to six years; by 2005, it is expected to be just two years. As a result, a growing fraction of electronic equipment becomes obsolete each year.

The increasing quantity of used electronic equipment poses new challenges for waste management officials. Because much of the equipment is bulky, it is costly to collect and takes up significant space in landfills. In addition, some equipment can contain hazardous materials, such as heavy metals or lead, which could be released into the environment during incineration or concentrated in incineration ash. In the United States alone, some experts estimate that approximately one billion pounds of lead from computers and other electronic devices will enter the waste stream within the next decade.

RFF Senior Fellows Karen Palmer and Molly Macauley, Fellow Jih-Shyang Shih, intern Heather Holsinger, and Resident Scholar Margaret Walls will examine existing policies and practices in the United States and other developed countries to

draw important lessons about the future of managing end-of-life electronics. They also will develop a simulation model to assess the economic-efficiency implications of different policies that promote recycling of equipment containing hazardous materials, such as computer monitors and televisions.

Several waste disposal policies have already been mandated or proposed, with varying degrees of success. In the United States, under Subtitle C of the Resources Conservation and Recovery Act, large commercial and industrial generators must dispose of used cathode ray tubes (from computer monitors and television sets) at a hazardous waste facility, which can be quite costly. Thus, many households and businesses are storing them, in the hopes of finding some valuable use for them in the future.

Current Practices

Currently Massachusetts is the only state that has banned the disposal of cathode ray tubes at all municipal solid waste landfills and incinerators. The state government has provided funding to municipalities to collect cathode ray tubes via contract recyclers and arrangements with charity organizations.

The European Union, in its July 1998 "Proposal for a Directive on Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment," called on member states to require distributors and manufacturers to take back for disposal electrical and electronic equipment when purchasers are through with this equipment, and to set ambitious recycling goals for that equipment. Although the proposal has been delayed, several countries including the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands are developing their own regulations to establish manufacturer take-back systems for electronics.

A number of U.S. electronics manufac-

turers, including Apple Computer, Inc. and Compaq Computer Corporation, are taking matters into their own hands. In an effort to reduce the quantity of waste associated with their products, these companies are changing the design of their products to minimize unnecessary material use, extend product life, and/or make products easier to recycle.

The RFF researchers plan to analyze the effects of different policy options, such as deposit/refunds, environmental taxes, and landfill bans, on the behavior of recyclers, manufacturers, and consumers and on the ultimate effects of electronics waste management in general.

One policy option under review is the use of tradable credits. These credits would be similar to tradable emission allowances used by the electric utility sector to control pollution. Because tradable emission allowances have been effective in reducing the cost of controlling both air and water pollution, the researchers will explore the feasibility of targeting tradable credits toward the recovery of used electronics products or the greater use of secondary inputs by electronics manufacturers.

The researchers' initial focus on electronics disposal marks the first phase of a larger, two-year project on the economics of waste management in general. The full project will include a study of the optimal structure of contracts between municipalities and private companies for handling solid waste collection, disposal, and recycling. The researchers also will analyze the effects of carbon taxes and other types of carbon policies on recycling paper, plastic, aluminum, and solid waste in general.

The RFF team will develop a series of reports and a set of scholarly papers, and conduct presentations and briefings at international workshops and conferences. 