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EPIF visitors hit all-time high

The four-day Eco-products International Fair (EPIF) 2008 got underway to the cheerful rhythm of traditional Vietnamese drums and the visual spectacle of a dragon dance on 1 March. The opening stage, constructed in front of the National Convention Center (NCC) Hanoi, the fair venue, was surrounded by special guests comprising exhibitors, international participants, supporting organizations, and organizers, as well as local and international spectators and media.



Visitors throng first floor of the exhibition hall

The EPIFs are among the largest international environmental exhibitions in Asia. Each one has been increasingly successful in showcasing the most advanced environmental technologies, providing opportunities to explore business collaborations, and promoting public awareness of environmentally friendly products and services since the first fair opened in Malaysia in 2004.

The 4th EPIF, organized by the APO in collaboration with the Directorate for Standards and Quality (STAMEQ), Vietnam Productivity Centre (VPC), and Vietnam Association for Conservation of Nature and Environment, was a smashing success. Over the course of the four-day event, close to 100,000 people attended, breaking the previous attendance record set in Singapore in 2006 by approximately three-fold. The EPIF 2008 also made history by being not only the first event held in Vietnam to promote eco-products and -services but also one of the largest exhibitions ever held in Hanoi.

More than 90 businesses and organizations exhibited state-of-the-art environment-friendly technologies, products, and services that can enhance productivity and competitiveness in harmony with environmental protection. Participants traveled to Vietnam for the EPIF 2008 not only from APO member countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, but also from nonmembers like the People's Republic of China and Germany.

Vietnam was the natural choice for the EPIF 2008, as APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka stated in his opening address, "As a member of the APO, Vietnam has so far implemented more Green Productivity (GP)-related projects than any other member country, mostly in the field of community development. It was no surprise to us, therefore, when Vietnam expressed its readiness to host this EPIF."

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Vice Chairman of the National Assembly Nguyen Duc Kien, in his opening remarks, spoke passionately on the importance of sustainable development, referring to major policies that the Vietnamese government had undertaken to achieve “Sustainable Development and a Better Life,” the theme of this year’s fair. “The year 2008 is an important year in the five-year plan 2006–2010 leading up to the special 1,000-year anniversary of Thăng Long [a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage complex] in Hanoi. This Eco-products International Fair is a meaningful milestone for those events,” said Vice Chairman Kien.



Guests of honor at ribbon-cutting ceremony to open the EPIF 2008

As part of the opening ceremony, Prof. Ryoichi Yamamoto, Vice Chairperson of the GP Advisory Committee (GPAC) presented Vice Chairman Kien with the newly published *Eco-products Directory 2008*. The directory contains a trove of more than 700 eco-products/services developed by environmentally advanced enterprises, of which more than 400 are categorized as effective in preventing global warming. The *Eco-products Directory 2008* greatly expands on the 591 items in the 2006 edition, with new categories introduced. The previous editions have attracted attention from various environment-related groups not only within Asia but globally. In light of international interest in the directory, the APO is planning to distribute the most recent edition to participants and local media attending the G8 summit meeting to be held in Hokkaido, Japan, this summer.

sumption. They were joined by more than 150 local attendees. Renowned international and local speakers delivered presentations on the best eco-practices of industries, regions, and countries for sustainable development including the keynote address made by GPAC Chairperson Dr. Tamotsu Nomakuchi, Chairman of Mitsubishi Electric Corporation. All the presentations were simultaneously interpreted into English and Vietnamese.

Other concurrent events included the Forum on Eco-Community for Asia held at Hanoi Architectural University on 3 March, and Workshop on Green Purchasing and Green Supply Chain at the NCC. Various cultural and artistic activities at the venue drew large audiences during the entire duration and included musical recitals, puppet shows, and student dramas.



Fun-fair photos with an environmental twist

In parallel with the EPIF 2008 was the International Conference on Promotion of Eco-products for Competitiveness and Sustainable Consumption, organized by the APO and VPC. Thirty-nine APO participants attended the conference in the NCC conference hall. They included representatives of private enterprises involved in eco-product development, concerned NGOs, and members of the public involved in the promotion of sustainable con-

The organizers’ booth distributed the APO introductory leaflet as well as postcards featuring winning photographs from the APO photo contests, including those from Vietnam. STAMEQ and the VPC also displayed various publications and leaflets to promote the concept of productivity and sustainability. The eco-wish tree where visitors were invited to post their environmental messages was as popular as at previous fairs, especially with the addition of cherry blossom notepaper. Many messages from students showed their determination to protect the environment: “Let’s protect our planet”; “Clean environment for peace for life”; “Protect our environment for your and our future”; etc. Most students emphasized the importance of working together to save the earth and nature. “I came here to see how the eco-concept is adopted into products or services. I am so excited to see all these new ideas and products,” said college student Vu Thi Thu Hang, with a shy smile during an interview at the APO booth. Tran Ngo Khanh, a consultant in the field of building materials, echoed that sentiment: “I am very happy to know that Vietnam hosts this kind of grand exhibition. I hope this event will be held next year as well.”

The APO’s efforts to promote the eco-spirit will continue. The excitement and attention that the EPIF 2008 generated will only encourage the host of the next fair. It is hoped that Vietnam will follow the lead of Thailand, a previous host country, by holding a domestic Eco-products Fair in the near future. ☺