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Twenty-ninth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-29) of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)

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Moscow, Russian Federation

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda)

Air Pollution

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Air pollution remains one of the most significant environmental health risks in Asia and the Pacific. While the region has seen unprecedented economic growth, it simultaneously faces a silent pandemic of poor air quality. Recent data indicate a complex landscape of air quality trends. Across most subregions, levels of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) have begun to decline, and East and North-East Asia has recorded some of the most visible gains in $PM_{2.5}$ control over the past decade as a result of sustained policies aimed at curbing industrial emissions and coal combustion and at strengthening vehicle standards. At the same time, serious pollution problems persist due to the technical complexity of controlling secondary aerosols and photochemical pollution, including ground-level ozone.[1]

2. At its twenty-eighth session, held on 22-23 September 2025 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, the Senior Officials Meeting adopted the NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030 and the NEACAP Activity Plan 2026. The new five-year Work Plan aims to develop the North-East Asian Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) into a fully functioning platform for strategic and effective cooperation on air pollution in North-East Asia. It identifies four priority areas: (a) air quality management and its synergies with climate strategies; (b) clean technologies and low emission policy measures; (c) policy support and collaboration; and (d) capacity-building. The delivery of the 2026 Activity Plan provided momentum in operationalizing the new five-year Work Plan through regional knowledge-sharing activities, expanded partnerships and continued operation of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee (SPC).

II. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2026 ACTIVITY PLAN

Knowledge Sharing: Side Event at the Ninth Session of the Committee on Environment and Development of ESCAP

3. On 2 July 2026, NEACAP convened the side event "*Advancing Clean Air in Asia and the Pacific: Lessons from North-East Asia for Regional Action*" at the United Nations Conference Centre (Bangkok, Thailand), in conjunction with the ninth session of the ESCAP Committee on Environment and Development (CED-9). Together with NEACAP and ESCAP, the side event was jointly organized by the Chinese Academy of Environmental Sciences (CRAES) and the National Institute of Environmental Research of the Republic of Korea (NIER), both serving as NEACAP Technical Centers.

[1] Excerpts from *Ensuring clean air in Asia and the Pacific* (ESCAP/CED(9)/3).

4. The side event showcased national achievements in air quality management, including bilateral cooperation between China and the Republic of Korea, and facilitated the exchange of experiences across Asia-Pacific subregions. It also explored opportunities to strengthen regional and subregional partnerships, promote synergies between clean air and climate action, and enhance NEACAP's contribution to the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution (RARAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals. The side event was also the first regional outreach organized under NEACAP, which provided an avenue in raising regional visibility of the subregional cooperation on air pollution facilitated under NEASPEC.

Knowledge Sharing: 2026 Blue Sky Symposium

5. The 2026 Blue Sky Symposium was held on 7 September 2026 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, to commemorate the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies. The Symposium was jointly organized by the ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (serving as the secretariat of NEACAP), the National Air Emission Inventory and Research Center of the Republic of Korea (a NEACAP Technical Center), and the United Nations Environment Programme (serving as the secretariat of the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia). Under the theme "Towards Coordinated and Integrated Air Quality Management: Addressing PM and Ozone Interlinkages", the symposium brought together government officials, researchers, technical experts, private sector, and international organizations to exchange experiences and knowledge on addressing particulate matter and ozone pollution.

6. The symposium featured three thematic sessions covering country experiences and policy approaches to addressing PM and ozone interlinkages; the use of artificial intelligence, monitoring, modelling and forecasting to strengthen air quality analysis and management; and approaches to translating scientific evidence into effective governance and policy responses. Discussions highlighted the importance of coordinated approaches to managing PM and ozone, a stronger science-policy interface, and enhanced regional cooperation and knowledge exchange to support more effective air quality management in North-East Asia and beyond.

7. The symposium marked the first collaboration organized under NEACAP with UNEP and EANET, which advances the envisaged output under the NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030 to strengthen synergies with existing collaborative programmes and mechanisms.

Knowledge Dissemination: Outreach

8. Based on the NEACAP Policy Analysis Report "*Success and Challenges in Addressing Air Pollution in North-East Asia- A Call to Strengthen Regional Collaboration* ", the secretariat developed infographics highlighting key achievements in addressing air pollution in North-East Asia. The infographics summarize the report's key messages and outline NEACAP's future direction in strengthening regional cooperation on air quality management. The report, together with other NEACAP initiatives, was highlighted in CED-9 as contributing to stronger evidence-based policymaking in North-East Asia.[2]

9. The secretariat also prepared an ESCAP blog article showcasing the progress made in reducing PM pollution across North-East Asia, while highlighting the importance of continued efforts to address remaining and emerging air quality challenges. In addition, the article highlighted NEACAP's contribution to regional cooperation, knowledge sharing and science-policy dialogue on air pollution in North-East Asia.

NEACAP Science and Policy Committee

10. The eighth meeting of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee (SPC-8) was held on 3 July in Bangkok, Thailand. It brought together SPC members from China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, as well as representatives of designated Technical Centers from China and the Republic of Korea. (Annex I)

11. SPC-8 welcomed the timely implementation of the NEACAP Activity Plan 2026 and reviewed lessons learned from the CED-9 side event. It recommended strengthening research on air quality management and its synergies with climate strategies, including through the development of the next NEACAP flagship knowledge product. The Committee also emphasized the importance of collaboration among member States, Technical Centers and partner organizations in delivering future activities.

12. In line with the institutional roles under the NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030, SPC continues to serve as the principal advisory, steering the work programme and Technical Centres deliver technical expertise and contribute to NEACAP activities, with both designated by NEASPEC Member Governments. (Annex II)

[2] ESCAP/CED(9)/3.

III. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR 2027

13. SPC-8 reviewed the proposed NEACAP Activity Plan 2027 and found it consistent with the NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030. The proposed plan comprises four activities; (a) initiating analytical work on air quality management and its synergies with climate strategies; (b) organizing the NEACAP Symposium; (c) conducting capacity-building activities, in cooperation with Technical Centers and external partners; and (d) convening the ninth meeting of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee. The delivery of NEACAP activities in 2027 will lay the groundwork for outreach and capacity building engagements in 2028, marking the 10th year anniversary of NEACAP.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

14. The Meeting may wish to request member States to:

(a) Review and approve the proposed activity plan for 2027 and provide further guidance on its implementation (Annex III);

(b) Review and update, as appropriate, the nominations of members of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee and focal points for the Technical Centers, including any changes or new nominations; and

(c) Indicate interest in hosting the Ninth Meeting of the Science and Policy Committee (SPC-9) and other related activities.

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