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Russian experience in joint response to transboundary emergencies on international watercourses, pollution of Amur River in 2005
The Russian Federation

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The Amur River

The Amur river basin is located in moderate geographical latitudes of East Asia. As to the area of the river basin (1855 thousand km²), the Amur takes the fourth place among Russian rivers (after Jenisej, Obi, and Lena, and the tenth among world rivers. Average water use in the vicinity of Komsomolsk on the Amur is 9819 m³/sek, while in the vicinity of the estuary of the river it is 11 400 m³/sek.
From the viewpoint of the valley characteristics, the Amur is divided into three major parts: upper Amur (to the estuary of the River Zeja; 883 kilometres), flow rate there is 5.3 km/h, middle Amur (from the estuary of the River Zeja to the estuary of the River Ussuri inclusive; 975 kilometres), flow rate there is 5,5 km/h, and lower Amur (from the estuary of the River Ussuri to Mikołajewsk on the Amur; 966 kilometres), flow rate there is 4,2 km/h.
Amur river basin spreads over the territory of three countries: Russia (995 thousand km², approx. 54% of the territory), as well as China (44,2 %) and Mongolia (1,8 %). Approx. 3000 km of the borderline between Russia and China runs along the Amur River. Those territories are inhabited by about thirty different ethnic groups.

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Ecological status of the Amur river basin

Present ecological status of the Amur river basin on the Chabarovsk County of the Russian Federation is assessed as critical, due to high levels of pollution in the Amur tributaries. Inconsiderate usage of natural resources does not open the river's own capabilities to restore ecosystems. At present, Amur is one of the most polluted Russian rivers.
In the last 15 years, the class of purity of water in the Amur has changed from "moderately polluted" (class III) to "very polluted" (class VI). Practically every year, the researchers register the top normative levels of phenols, nitrates and microbiological indicators being exceeded.

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Trans-border situation

Trans-border effects of industrial activities at either side of the river leads to increasing degradation of the Amur ecosystem, and losing its significance as a source of drinkable water, both for the inhabitants of the Russian, and Chinese sections of the Amur.

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Ecological disaster of Amur-Sungari rivers

As a result of an industrial accident which occurred on 15 November 2005 in one of the Chinese chemical plants in the town of Jilin (China), there was a massive release of toxic substances to the Sungari River, which is a tributary to Amur and, as the result, a spill of nitrobenzene and other chemicals flowed along the Amur river. The spillage of benzene compounds was 180 kilometres long.
In order to prevent the poisoned water from flowing from the Chabarovsk water reservoirs, a dam was built at the source of Kozakiewicz tributary and, consequently, the stream of poisoned water which reached this area about 20 December, could be directed onto the northern, Russian bank. In April 2006, the dam was partly dismantled, and its complete disassembly has been planned for the nearest future.

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Steps taken:

In view of an ecological disaster, there was a Chabarovsk County Regional Government Committee meeting on prevention and counteracting emergencies. The Committee developed a plan of urgent action to prevent and counteract the effects of possible emergency in view of the Amur River pollution.
In 2006, Russian and Chinese experts jointly monitored ecological conditions in Amur and Sungari rivers which indicated that there was no dimethylbenzene in the water.

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Russian-Chinese collaboration (1)

A joint committee to debate the matters of **the rational usage and protection of resources of trans-border waters was** set up. Between 26 and 28 of December 2008, in Chabarovsk, a representative of the Federal Hydrometeorology and Natural Environment Monitoring Office participated in the meeting of joint Russian-Chinese committee on matters of matters of the rational usage and protection of resources of trans-border waters, in order to co-ordinate the implementation of the agreement between the government of the Russian Federation and the government of the Chinese People's Republic rational usage and protection of resources of trans-border waters.

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Russian-Chinese collaboration (2)

The meeting of joint **Russian-Chinese committee** the following issues were discussed:

- **A project of an act** on the order of work of the joint Russian-Chinese committee to debate the matters of the rational usage and protection of resources of trans-border waters, containing the key tasks, the Committee's content and structure;
- **Participants** both on the Russian, and Chinese side;
- **the Committee's work itinerary** for 2009 – both parties agreed as to mutual activities concerning the establishment of operational teams, procuring documents on common monitoring of purity of trans-border waters, of preparing materials on the network of hydrological monitoring stations, organization of the second Committee meeting, scheduled for October 2009 in Hangzhou (China).

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Russian-Chinese collaboration (3)

On 29 January, 2008 the Russian Federation and China signed an **International Agreement** on protection and use of trans-border waters.

The most important areas of cooperation outlined in the agreement with China are as follows:

- Working out common standards and final indicators of the quality of trans-border waters;
- Help with the application of contemporary technologies for the rational usage and protection of resources trans-border waters;
- Informing parties about current default and planned actions which might lead to considerable trans-border effects, and preventing such effects.
- Moreover, the document is envisages maintenance the existing hydro technological equipment and other devices in suitable technical condition;
- Carrying out projects aimed at stability of river beds out and preventing their erosion;
- Monitoring trans-border waters and the exchange of monitoring data; involvement in joint research;
- Cooperation in the field of the hydrology, preventing trans-border water floods, and other issues.

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Russian-Chinese collaboration (4)

On 12 November 2008, Russia and China **a memorandum** on establishing a procedure of mutual notification and information exchange in case of arising a trans-border ecological emergency or accident. In particular, parties agreed about immediate mutual notification about leaks of radioactive substances, dangerous chemical substances, pollution of large surface of trans-border water or air space.

The formal side, on behalf of Russia, will be dealt with by the Federal Hydrometeorology and Natural Environment Monitoring Office, and on behalf of China, the Chinese Centre of Ecological Emergencies and Research.

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Russian-Chinese collaboration (5)

During the meeting of the President of the Russian Federation, D.A Medviediev with the Chairman of the People's Republic of China, Hu Jintao between 16 and 18 of June 2009, it was noted that:

- Both countries would foster a **dynamic development of joint activities** in natural environment protection, being an important element of Russian-Chinese strategic partnership.
- Parties **agreed** to increase cooperation in the area of rational usage and protection of resources of trans-border waters;
- Heads of states **favourably assessed** joint monitoring of purity of trans-border water installations, active notification and information exchange in case of trans-border environmental emergencies, as well as information exchange on maintaining the diversity of natural environment and trans-border protected waters.

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Thank you