From the Land of the Morning Calm
Update from the Korean Society for Atmospheric Environment

Editor’s Note: A&WMA is a founding member of the International Union of Air Pollution Prevention and Environmental Protection Associations (IUAPPA), an international organization made up of air pollution control and environmental protection associations from around the world. This column highlights the work underway in IUAPPA and in the various associations around the world that are members of IUAPPA.

Underneath the cool autumn night sky, a gala banquet was underway on a cliff overlooking the Han River, which bisects the giant metropolis of Seoul, Korea. The scene was the beautiful Jade Garden of the Sheraton Walker-Hill Hotel at the 2001 IUAPPA World Clean Air Congress. In attendance were the mayor of Seoul; the Minister of Environment for Korea; Dr. Won-Hoon Park, then-president of IUAPPA; Dr. Gyoo-Won Lee, then-president of the Korean Society for Atmospheric Environment (KOSAE); many foreign and domestic dignitaries; along with several hundred members of IUAPPA and KOSAE. Korea used to be known as the “Land of the Morning Calm,” although that evening was anything but calm. It was vibrant and exciting, with hundreds of attendees dancing on the outdoor garden stage to the band’s music.

As the official host of that 2001 IUAPPA World Clean Air Congress, this marked an important turning point in the history of KOSAE, with the traditional focus on domestic national and local air quality management issues expanding to a global focus, including issues such as regional long-range transport of air pollutants and dust particles, global climate change and its impact on local environments, and international cooperation opportunities.

The theme of “globalization” continues to be stressed by the current KOSAE board and its president, Dr. K.C. Moon, vice president of the Korea Institute of Science & Technology. In January 2008, a new “International Director” position was installed within the KOSAE board to oversee international exchange activities with IUAPPA, A&WMA, the Japan Society for Atmospheric Environment (JSAE), and other organizations concerned with atmospheric environment issues. Dr. Moon, coincidentally, served as A&WMA’s Korea Section Chair. He is currently also vice president of IUAPPA.

Established in February 1983, KOSAE was known as the Korea Air Pollution Research Association (KAPRA) until the current name was adopted in November 1998. Although there are several other societies that have environmental issues or meteorology/climatology as their main theme, KOSAE is the only research society in Korea to carry the banner of “research and management of the atmospheric environment.” KOSAE currently has seven technical subdivisions: Atmospheric Measurements & Analysis, Current Status & Management, Dispersion & Reaction, Control Technology, Global Environment, Health & Ecological Effect, and Indoor Air Quality. The society’s latest initiatives have resulted in the formation of two additional technical subdivisions: Odor (along with excessive noise, odor is the major source of civil complaints in Korea) and Education (there is a sense of crisis in the environmental engineering education sector due to the ever-decreasing demand for its graduates in the local markets).

The majority of KOSAE’s members work in academia—professors, researchers, and graduate and undergraduate students from universities and colleges—but there also are members from national and provincial government offices, nongovernmental organizations, and the business sector. These members are currently very active in state-of-the-art research of air quality management, atmospheric chemistry, and climate change. The society is also conducting several government-sponsored research projects and a few projects that will decide the air pollution management policies of Korea.

One of the more exciting new activities that KOSAE is undertaking is its annual “Overseas Visit & Learn” series. This program began in 2006 when more than 30 members visited Dunhuang in western China, at the gateway to the Taklamakan Desert, a source of some serious dust storms that occur annually in the springtime in East Asia. After a visit to an active volcano site in Japan in 2007, this year members will visit Nepal and learn about the country’s challenges regarding air quality management.

Additionally, KOSAE hosts biannual academic conferences each spring and fall. During the spring conference, KOSAE invites members of JSAE to a Joint International Symposium to discuss current research topics, while in the fall, KOSAE members visit the JSAE annual conference. KOSAE also publishes three journals: Journal of KOSAE (main language Korean), Journal of KOSAE (English), and Asian Journal of Atmospheric Environment (AJAE; English), a start-up international journal published in cooperation with JSAE. The first issue of AJAE was published in December 2007.

These activities are in tune with KOSAE’s ambition to truly become a leader in Asia for air quality and atmospheric environment issues. With the guidance of a very experienced president and the accompanying energy of a newly-formed dynamic board, KOSAE is laying the groundwork to enter an era of international cooperation and leadership such as has never been seen before during its 25-year history. For more information about KOSAE, visit www.kosae.or.kr.