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Commission and EEA make public extensive information about industrial pollution in your neighbourhood

Today the European Commission and the European Environment Agency (EEA) launched the European Pollutant Emission Register (EPER), the first Europe-wide register of industrial emissions into air and water. For the first time, detailed information on pollution from around 10,000 large industrial facilities in the EU and Norway is publicly accessible on the internet

<http://www.eper.cec.eu.int/>.

EPER enables European citizens to exercise their 'right to know', allowing them, for example, to see how much pollution large industries in their neighbourhoods generate and to compare this with the situation in other parts of Europe. Companies can measure themselves against their competitors, and for their part, scientists, insurance companies, local authorities and policy makers now have a solid database to help them choose the most effective solutions for reducing industrial pollution.

Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström said: "People have the right to know how polluted their environment really is, because it directly affects their health and their quality of life. To require that they are informed is one of the Commission's most important duties. The new register provides people with such information, allowing them to compare the environmental footprints of different industries in different towns and regions. With this knowledge, they can put pressure on politicians and the industry - the information empowers them and is key to their involvement in environmental protection."

Prof. Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director of the EEA, added: "EPER is a milestone in the provision of information to the European public about their immediate environment. The European Environment Agency plans to build on this by creating an extensive internet portal to regional and selected localised environmental information covering the complete area of the Agency's 31 member countries by 2008."

What is EPER?

EPER 2004, the European Pollutant Emission Register, is the first Europe-wide register of emissions into air and water from large and medium-sized industrial installations, including large pig and poultry farms. It covers 50 different pollutants and comprises data from all Member States as well as Norway, which has volunteered to participate. From March onward, data from Hungary, too, will be included on a voluntary basis.

The EPER reporting website, which includes all reported data, is hosted by the EEA in Copenhagen. In close cooperation with the Commission, the EEA has managed the process of collecting the data for EPER from Member States, Norway and Hungary and has been heavily involved in the design and development of the website.

EPER is accessible to everybody at

<http://www.eper.cec.eu.int/>

and makes it possible to search for the following data:

- Emissions from a specific industrial site by name, postal code, address or simply its location (map search)
- Industries in specific countries or by a specific activity
- Emissions by name of pollutants
- Combinations of all of these. Anyone can create their own overviews on pollution by activity, per country or in the EU as a whole!

EPER also gives valuable information on every reported pollutant and its general impacts on human health and the environment.

For example, EPER shows that 3,029 large pig and poultry farms are responsible for 78% of ammonia emissions into the air. Ammonia is a pungent-smelling gas that is noticeable in the air in quite low concentrations. High local concentrations of ammonia are toxic to health and may harm vegetation.

Mercury, which is classified as a priority hazardous substance under the EU Water Framework Directive, is emitted to water by the chemicals industry (53%), the metal industry (17%) and the pulp and paper industry (7%). With regard to mercury emitted to air, energy-generating industries are the biggest polluters, followed by the metal industry and the chemical industry.

Who will gain from EPER?

Everybody will gain from EPER data. **Citizens** can see for themselves which emissions industries in their neighbourhoods produce and compare them with the emissions from other industries in other towns - even in other European countries. This enables them to ask questions about the amount of emissions, the risks they pose, potential reduction measures, etc.

Companies can look at what their competitors across Europe are doing, increase their efforts to improve their environmental performance and show the public what is being done.

Scientists, insurance companies, local authorities and policy makers have gained a good information base on emissions. For instance it is now possible to compare the emissions of an individual sector with the emissions of other industrial sectors. This will help everybody choose the most cost effective solutions for reducing pollution.

Where does EPER come from?

The Commission has promoted providing environmental information to citizens and involving them in environmental protection for a long time. In 1990, it granted the public access to data held by local authorities with the Directive on public access to environmental information.

The idea of creating emission inventories came up at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and received the support of the OECD. In the EU, it became a requirement with the 1996 Directive concerning Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC Directive), which states: "An inventory of the principal emissions and sources responsible shall be published every three years by the Commission on the basis of the data supplied by the Member States."

By 2000 all the necessary details were worked out and outlined in the Commission Decision to establish EPER (2000/479/EC).

Next steps

This summer the Commission will publish a report reviewing and evaluating the timeliness and quality of the data reported by the Member States. It is already evident that the EPER data are not complete for some pollutants and countries, especially in sectors such as pig and poultry farms, landfills, metal surface treatment and industrial discharges into municipal sewer systems.

The Commission will continue to improve, develop and upgrade EPER. The immediate next steps include the translation of the EPER website into every official language of the EU and, in co-operation with the Joint Research Centre, Ispra and the EEA, the inclusion of satellite images of the areas surrounding the industrial facilities in colour. At the moment, these pictures are still black and white for some countries.

The EU also intends to ratify the UN-ECE Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) under the Aarhus Convention. As a result, EPER will eventually be upgraded to a fully comprehensive European PRTR, which means that the public will get more information - for example on what industries do with waste. The Commission plans to put forward a proposal for a Regulation concerning the establishment of the European PRTR this summer.

Under the Commission Decision on EPER, Member States have to update the data every three years, so the next reporting exercise will take place in 2006. Then, all the new Member States will be obliged to participate.

Further information

A 8-min. video called "EPER - Engine for Change" in broadcast-quality is available to TV journalists free of charge and copyright at

<http://www.tvlink.org/>

The EPER reporting website and the Commission Decision 2000/479/EC establishing it can be found at

<http://www.eper.cec.eu.int/>

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