

Brussels, 9 November 2009

Pollution: new European register gives public access to information on emissions from European industrial facilities

The European Commission and the European Environment Agency today launched a comprehensive new European pollutant release and transfer register – E-PRTR. The register contains information about the emissions of pollutants to air, water and land by industrial facilities throughout Europe. It includes annual data for 91 substances and covers more than 24 000 facilities in 65 economic activities. It also provides additional information, such as the amount and types of waste transferred from facilities to waste handlers both inside and outside each country.

Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said: "Transparency is a vital tool for improving our environment. The opening of this register will give citizens direct access to information on emissions from facilities across Europe and will help them to engage actively in decisions affecting the environment. It demonstrates a genuine commitment by the public authorities and industry to share information with citizens and increase openness."

Professor Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency, said: "To achieve the public participation objective set by the Aarhus Convention, people first need to know what is happening to their environment and what is at stake. With this new register, we take an important step in placing more environmental information at their fingertips. Anyone can now see how much pollution is being released to air and water from facilities in their neighbourhood or region."

What does the register cover?

In order to improve public access to environmental information, a new E-PRTR register has been set up, containing data reported by individual facilities. The register is accessible at: <http://prtr.ec.europa.eu/> and provides details of pollutants released from individual facilities to air, water and land in 2007. The information in the register covers 30% of total NO_x (nitrogen oxides) emissions (i.e. most emissions from sources other than transport) and 76% of total SO_x (sulphur oxides) emissions to air in the EU-27 countries and Norway. The register also shows the amount of waste and waste water transferred to other locations, including transboundary transfers of hazardous waste, and gives preliminary information on pollutants from 'diffuse' sources released to water, such as nitrogen and phosphorus loss from agriculture.

The website has a powerful search engine that allows visitors to search using one or more criteria and a map tool. For example, visitors can search the amount of hazardous and non-hazardous waste transferred from facilities in a country (waste search), or releases from a specific industrial site by name or location (facility search).

What kind of information can be obtained?

E-PRTR reveals, for example, that:

- Often a small number of facilities make large overall contributions to the total amount of pollutants released in Europe. For instance, just five large combustion plants were collectively responsible for more than 20% of all E-PRTR sulphur oxide emissions to air in 2007. Sulphur oxides contribute to both environmental acidification and the formation of health-damaging particulate matter.
- More than 54 million tonnes of hazardous waste were transferred from E-PRTR facilities. Most hazardous waste is recovered or disposed of within the country where it originates; just a small fraction of it (approximately 6%) is transported across borders.

Background

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the 'Aarhus Convention') grants the public rights to access environmental information.

In 2003, parties to the Aarhus Convention adopted the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR), which entered into force on 8 October 2009. The European Community is a signatory to the Protocol and has passed a Regulation (EC No 166/2006) to implement it. The Regulation defines minimum levels of activity and pollution above which information must be reported. It also goes beyond the PRTR Protocol by requiring Member States to report information on an additional five pollutants and imposing more stringent reporting thresholds for another six.

From 2010 onwards, the information in E-PRTR will be updated in April each year. In addition to the 27 Member States of the European Union, it also includes data from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The website, including the information on diffuse source releases, will gradually be improved in coming months.

The former European pollutant register EPER covered 50 pollutants released to air and water from 56 industrial activities in 12 000 facilities in 26 countries (EU-25 and Norway). EPER required countries to report only every third year and included information from just two reporting years — 2001 and 2004.

About the European Environment Agency (EEA)

The EEA is based in Copenhagen. The Agency helps achieve significant and measurable improvement in Europe's environment by providing timely, targeted, relevant and reliable information to policy-makers and the public.