



NEWS RELEASE

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Tackling wastewater pollution at source cheaper than cleaning up

Policies using taxes to cut pollution offer the most cost effective route to reaching EU wastewater targets

A 'Polluter pays' approach, based on taxes and levies, reduces volumes of polluted water and offers the most cost effective route to compliance with EU legislation, according to a new report from the European Environment Agency (EEA) based in Copenhagen. The pilot study, 'Effectiveness of Urban Wastewater Treatment Policies in Selected Countries', analyses successes and failures in policy for Denmark, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. It explains the relationship between effective wastewater management and the policies behind them.

Water pollution caused by 'untreated' wastewater continues despite three decades of efforts to clean up European surface waters. Several EU Member States have not satisfied the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD), originally adopted in 1991 to cut waste water pollution by 2000.

The Dutch model, which is based on high water pollution levies and full costing of sewerage, comes close to satisfying the legislation and is the most cost-effective of the examples in the report. The report suggests that the absence of water pollution taxes in France and Spain will result in these countries failing to reach the 2005 targets cost-effectively. Denmark complies fully with the Directive, with discharges decreasing by 90%.

"The Dutch example shows the financial benefits of finding the 'upstream' solution to tackling waste water pollution rather than paying for clean-up at the end," says Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency.

Both new Member States in the study, Poland and Estonia, have until 2010 to comply. However, both countries will need considerable EU support if they are going to hit the targets. In several member states water pollution control costs have absorbed more than 50% of all environmental investment in recent decades.

New Member States are eligible for considerable EU subsidies (75-85% of cost) from EU Cohesion and Structural Funds. It is estimated that increased support of between 40-50 euro per person will be needed if these countries are to meet the deadlines.

"The risk is that the new Member States will be tempted to build treatment plants instead of taking the more cost-effective path of tackling the problem at source," says Professor Jacqueline McGlade.

Report: [Effectiveness of urban wastewater treatment policies in selected countries](#)

Brochure: [Policy effectiveness evaluation](#)

Notes for Editors:

EU Cohesion & Structural Funds:

The Cohesion policy aims at reducing regional disparities in economic and social development in the European Union, by strengthening a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities and the development of employment and human resources. The Cohesion policy absorbs approximately one third of the EU budget.

Policy Effectiveness Evaluations:

Policy effectiveness evaluation raises questions about environmental policies: Are policies working? Are they worth the money invested in them, and if not how can they be improved? The EEA has identified policy effectiveness evaluation as a priority area, aiming to measure and to demonstrate the results of policies in order to justify them against broader policy objectives, and thus to support informed decision making. With the aim of gaining practical experience in doing policy effectiveness evaluations and to provide support in selected policy areas, the EEA has carried out pilot studies on the effectiveness of packaging waste management systems, and on wastewater policies.

About the EEA

The European Environment Agency is the leading public body in Europe dedicated to providing sound, independent information on the environment to policy-makers and the public. The EEA has been operational in Copenhagen since 1994.

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