

**Launch of the European Pollutant Emission Register (EPER)  
EEA, Copenhagen  
23 February 2004**

**Speech delivered on behalf of  
the European Commissioner for the Environment  
by Paul McAleavey**

***“Information - Awareness - Action:  
The European Pollutant Emission Register (EPER)”***

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Commission – and Commissioner Wallström in particular – I would like to welcome you to the launch of the European Pollutant Emission Register.

The Commissioner regrets that – for family reasons – she was unable to join you today. She has asked me to deliver this address on her behalf.

Like most EU policies and instruments, the European Pollutant Emission Register tends to be known by its acronym, EPER. So, you might be interested to learn that during the preparations for enlargement, we learnt from our colleagues in Budapest that in Hungarian “EPER” means “strawberry”.

We liked this. Strawberries have a positive image. They look good - a nice bright red colour with a little green top. They taste good. And they are full of vitamins.

We hope that EPER will enjoy a similarly positive image and even greater health benefits.

At the outset, let me underline that we are targeting public awareness in order to provoke action on industrial emissions.

## **Why is raising awareness important, and how can it result in better health?**

Informing citizens and increasing their active participation are fundamental to environmental protection.

People have a right to know how good or bad the environment is. It affects their health and quality of life but in most cases pollution is not visible. This increases the responsibility of authorities to inform their citizens about the state of the environment.

This is also fully in line with the Commission's new strategy on Environment and Health, which places health concerns – and vulnerable groups such as children – at the focus of environmental policy concern.

Access to information lies at the heart of democracy. Only citizens who are informed are able to participate fully. Information empowers people.

Let me give you three concrete examples to illustrate these points.

### **1. Ground-level ozone**

The first example concerns ground level ozone. Everybody now recognises the importance of ensuring effective protection against its harmful effects on human health and the environment. High levels of ground-level ozone limit the growth of crops and forests and can produce severe respiratory problems, particularly in asthmatics, children and elderly people. During last year's hot summer, Europe suffered record concentrations of ground-level ozone, and many people died from heat stress combined with ground-level ozone.

But knowing about the danger of ground-level ozone is of little use unless we can actually do something about it. And this is where awareness-raising comes into play.

According to the new Ozone Directive, up-to-date information on concentrations of ozone must routinely be made available to the public by the most appropriate means, for example radio, TV and the internet.

The public must be informed of possible negative health effects as soon as concentrations reach the so-called "information threshold". And the authorities must consider action to prevent a further increase, for example by restricting road traffic. Action plans outlining such measures and the trigger values are drawn up in advance and must be made available to the public.

When excess concentrations are reached – and last summer this happened repeatedly in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands - a warning must be issued, advising particularly susceptible persons to stay indoors and recommending that the general public avoids strenuous physical activity.

If given complete and timely information, citizens can protect themselves from the dangers of ground-level ozone and take action to prevent further increases - for example, by going to work by public transport.

Let me give you another example.

## **2. Bathing Water Directive**

The 1976 Directive on the quality of bathing waters requires Member States to submit a comprehensive report on their bathing waters to the Commission. The Commission then publishes this information just before the start of the bathing season, usually with great media attention. In addition, the report can be consulted on the internet.

This is the most visited website of the Commission. In 2001 it had over 2 million hits, the majority in May and June as people planned their summer holidays. The bathing water website could provide a first benchmark for EPER in terms of the number of hits to achieve and overtake.

There is no doubt that the annual Bathing Water Report has helped to create wide-scale public awareness and thereby improve the quality of bathing water.

Allow me to give you one last example that shows how beneficial involvement of the public is.

## **3. Seveso II Directive**

Environmental disasters such as Seveso, Enschede, Toulouse and Baia Mare have drawn a lot of public attention to the safety of industrial plants. This public awareness has increased pressure for change, and as you know, the Commission has reacted by initiating new legislation aimed at improving the safety of industrial plants. The Directive to prevent industrial accidents – known as the Seveso Directive - is the best-known example.

Just as in the film industry, a successful directive often deserves a sequel! We proposed the Seveso II Directive in order to further strengthen the role of the public as regards control of major accident hazards. It requires that information

on safety measures and appropriate behaviour in the event of an accident are prepared in advance. This information is to be supplied regularly and in the most appropriate form to all persons and all establishments serving the public (such as schools and hospitals), which are likely to be affected by a major accident covered by the Directive.

But information for the public - and thus increased awareness - is not the only provision of the Directive. The safety report provided by the operator of the industrial facility and the inventory of dangerous substances present at the industrial facility must also be made publicly available.

These three examples show the enormously important role that information and awareness-raising can play in the planning and implementation of environmental actions.

They show that information provision is more than just an end in itself. It should be an engine for change towards environmental improvements.

### **So, how does the EPER raise public awareness?**

The idea of creating emission inventories was on the agenda of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In the EU, it became a requirement with the Directive concerning Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC Directive) of 1996, 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."

But it was not until 2000 that all the necessary details were worked out and outlined in the Commission Decision to establish the European Pollutant Emission Register (EPER), which we are here to launch today.

The EPER is the first European-wide register on industrial pollution. As it is publicly accessible on the internet, it offers a wealth of information that will raise awareness of environmental issues:

- Citizens and their associations can execute their "Right to know". They can now look at the emissions of the most significant industrial facilities in their neighbourhood and compare them with other facilities in other towns - even in other European countries. This should empower people to ask informed questions – and hopefully sometimes awkward questions - about reducing these emissions.

- Companies, in an increasingly globalised market, can look at what their competitors across Europe are doing, increase their efforts to excel in environmental protection, and then demonstrate this to the public.
- Scientists, insurance officers, local authorities and policy-makers too will be able to use this solid database on emissions. For instance, it is now possible to compare the emissions of an individual industrial sector with the emissions of other industrial sectors. This will help everybody to choose the most cost-effective solutions for reducing pollution from industrial facilities.

The website, which includes all the data reported, is hosted by the European Environment Agency. On behalf of the Commissioner, allow me to thank Jacqueline McGlade and her team at the Agency for the excellent work they have done on EPER. We look forward to continuing co-operation with the Agency on disseminating and further evaluating EPER data.

I will not go into details about how EPER works, because this will be explained in the video that we will watch in a moment, but I will say a few words about what happens next.

### **What happens next?**

The first report, for 2001, makes data from about 10,000 facilities in all the 15 Member States publicly accessible on the Internet. In addition, we were grateful to receive data from Norway and from Hungary.

By 2006, EPER will include data from 25 EU Member States. The new Member States are obliged to deliver their data for the first time in June 2006 for preparation of the second EPER report, which will cover the reporting year 2004. The fact that Hungary is already participating is an early indication of the attractiveness of EPER and of the environmental commitment of Hungarian officials.

This summer the Commission will publish the first EPER review report, which will include an analysis of the first reporting exercise and its results. It should highlight areas for improvement when the data are updated in 2006. The Commission invites all stakeholders to participate in the process of improving the data and their presentation.

Let me mention two very practical improvements we will make in the near future.

First, the reporting website is currently only available English. After receiving feedback from the public and upgrading the EPER software, we will be in a position to translate the reporting website into every official language in the EU.

Second, EPER is the first reporting tool in Europe which, besides maps, includes satellite images to show the location of industrial facilities. All facilities that delivered their co-ordinates are currently shown on black-and-white satellite images. With the support of the Joint Research Centre in Ispra and the EEA, all satellite images are due to be shown in colour by this spring at the latest.

But there is a more significant change for EPER on the horizon. The European Communities signed the UN-ECE Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) under the Aarhus Convention during the Fifth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in Kiev in May 2003.

The PRTR system envisaged by the UN-ECE Protocol is modelled on EPER, but goes a bit further. It covers more substances (86 instead of the 50 in the EPER), and more activities (65 instead of the 56 in EPER). It also covers emission releases to land (in addition to air and water). There also has to be public participation in decision-making, voluntary reporting on releases from diffuse sources and off-site transfers of waste, and annual reporting (instead of every three years).

The EU intends to ratify this Protocol as soon as possible. In the Commission we plan to put forward a proposal for a Regulation concerning the establishment of the European PRTR already this summer.

In other words, EPER will soon have to be upgraded to a fully comprehensive Pollutant Release and Transfer Register. The year 2007 could become the first reporting year for the European PRTR.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, let me underline that the launch of EPER today is a great achievement. There are many authors of this success and the Commissioner has asked me to express her gratitude to them.

We would again like to thank the European Environment Agency for their help on EPER and in hosting and organising this launch event.

Of course we also want to thank the Member States and their industries for their efforts in delivering as complete a set of data as possible in the given timeframe.

We thank the consultants CIBER and TNO for their commitment and professional work.

And the Commissioner would also like to thank publicly DG Environment – Herbert Aichinger, Bernd Mehlhorn and the team – for their efforts in launching EPER.

If I can leave you with one message from the Commissioner it is this - EPER should be a powerful engine for change.

We are not providing information simply in order to add to the overload of generalised information that we all now live with.

We are providing quality information in order to raise awareness.

We want to raise awareness to provoke action.

That action should lead to recognised environmental improvements.

Thank you for your attention.