

Appendix III

The Green Point Service (Public Information Office) of the Ministry of Environment and Water

The KvVM's Public Information Office was opened in June 1997; ever since, its services have been continuously available to the public. In order to meet the increasing demands of society (citizens, educational institutions, social organisations and professionals), the content and infrastructure of its activities have been continually improved. Currently, two full-time civil servants perform the duties of providing information to the public:

- processing reports from the public and forwarding them to the competent authorities,
- collecting, managing and providing up-to-date environmental data and information,
- processing citizens' reports and complaints,
- providing information on environmental parameters, threshold values and professional literature,
- managing and updating databases (e.g. NGOs, experts' directory),
- following the publication of tender announcements, issuing application forms, providing assistance with the application, information on the results and other possibilities available,
- providing access to legislation; providing data, publications and research possibilities for college and university students writing their thesis,
- providing teachers who attach special importance to environmental education with publications and leaflets in order to facilitate new approaches to environmental education classes and the organisation of school competitions in environmental studies.

At the Public Information Office, applications are registered, classified by subject and forwarded to the relevant professional unit. Since the Public Information Office may be accessed through the KvVM's home page, applications may also be submitted via the Internet.

If the data requested are unavailable at the Public Information Office, the Office will contact the competent ministry department or the competent authorities, and provide the requested data on the basis of the information received.

All Green Point services are free of charge.

The majority (80 per cent) of the enquiries at the Public Information Office are made by telephone. For the public, this appears to be the quickest way to enquire. In most cases, the Public Information Office is capable of providing an immediate response to enquiries by phone. If the relevant information or data cannot immediately be found, the applicant's call is returned. However, some people prefer to enquire in person or give a personal account of their complaints related to the environment or conservation. A substantial number of citizens visit the Public Information Office in person in order to pick up application forms during the spring and summer periods.

Typically, people living outside Budapest contact the Public Information Office by mail. Since most of these complaints and reports require action by the authorities, they are forwarded to the competent environmental, nature conservation or water management authorities, or the information services of other ministries. The Public Information Office also replies to some of the letters addressed to the Minister.

Due to technological advance and the increasing number of people with Internet access, the number of e-mail messages received has grown substantially. On average, 7-8 e-mails are received from citizens and the representatives of various businesses each day with questions, requests for advice or reporting pollution.

Figures for 2004

Enquiries by telephone	8,250
Personal enquiries	3,534
E-mail	2,578
Traditional mail	789

During the past seven years (until 31 October 2004), 74,435 people contacted the Public Information Office (15,161 in 2004). Weekly client turnover was between 250 and 320 on average, reaching 545 during application periods.

A form is completed for each enquiry, indicating the subject of the enquiry or report, the competent authority and, with the applicant's consent, the applicant's personal details. These forms are the basis for the weekly, monthly and annual statistics.

Thematic analysis of the client turnover of the Public Information Office:

Subject	Number of enquiries in 2004
Waste management	1,410
Water management	322
Soil pollution	175
Nature conservation	423
Noise and vibration protection	100
Air pollution	233
Urban environmental damage	247
Legal counselling	351
Economic regulators	1,354
NGOs	221
Environmental education	323
Applications	5,415
Data provision	4,587
Total	15,151

While there are no aggregate statistics concerning the queries received by regional agencies, some inspectorates also keep their own statistics. The South Transdanubian Inspectorate for Environmental Protection, for example, received 26 requests for information of public interest between January and October 2004. The required information was provided in each case, and no request was refused.

The KvVM's Public Information Office complies with the principal rule of the disclosure of data of public interest and the exemptions therefrom pursuant to the Data Protection Act, i.e. data of public interest in the Public Information Office's management are available to everyone unless the data is declared a state or official secret by law, or the right of disclosure of data is restricted by law according to defined data types, with regard to procedures concerning:

- national defence
- national security
- criminal prosecution, crime prevention
- central financial or currency policies
- foreign relations, relations with international organisations, and
- judicial proceedings.

Within the annual client turnover of the Public Information Office (approx. 15,000 clients), approx. 0.5 per cent of enquiries are unfulfillable (i.e. affecting 6-7 applicants a month) due to one of the following reasons:

- the information does not exist,
- the information is as yet incomplete – it is the subject of interdepartmental or administrative consultation,
- the request is too general or is unreasonable,
- it concerns a state or official secret,
- it concerns a trade or financial secret,
- it concerns intellectual property,
- the provision of information on the subject is reserved (by the Minister, the political undersecretary of state, the permanent undersecretary of state, or the head of Media Relations).

In order to improve the quality of and speed up the services it provides, the Public Information Office continuously collects data and compiles databases on, for example:

- the authorities,
- waste collection sites,
- experts' directory,
- fields of competence,
- protected species,
- protected areas,
- environmental and nature conservation organisations,
- professional publications,
- professional journals.

The KvVM's home page contains up-to-date information and draft statutes inviting comments.

Participation at professional and civil events, conferences and expositions serves the same purpose.