



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 92 – 1-5 November 2004

This year the *UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution* celebrates its **25th anniversary** and a special event will be held on 1 December. Since its adoption in November 1979 it has tackled some of the major environmental problems of the UNECE region through scientific collaboration and negotiation of policies.

The Convention has been extended by eight protocols over that time, each identifying specific measures to be taken by Parties to cut their emissions of air pollutants that damage the environment and harm human health.



➤ *History of the Convention*

In the 1970s increasing evidence showed that pollutants could travel from their point of emission to affect air quality and ecosystems hundreds of kilometres away. However, at the time the Convention was conceived, East-West relations were poor. UNECE provided a popular forum for communication in those difficult times and the Convention was a practical means for discussing environmental problems that most were keen to solve. Throughout the last 25 years there have been many political and economic changes, yet countries have worked together under the Convention demonstrating their concern about air pollution and their conviction that solutions could be found through international cooperation. The Convention

has been a unique regional agreement for addressing air pollution problems.

For the 25th anniversary of the Convention a book is being published which summarizes some of the past history and noting problems still to be solved. Many of the leading players in the Convention's work describe the development of the Convention as seen through the eyes of experts, delegates, chairmen and members of the secretariat. The book will offer a broad overview of the Convention's developing framework, provide an insight to the motives of its Parties and describe how science and policy have been combined in the interest of effective decision-making.



➤ *Current status of the Convention and its protocols*

Currently 48 ECE countries and the European Community are Parties to the Convention, and a further two UNECE States are signatories. Of the few countries not involved with the Convention, several, especially those in Central Asia, are now showing an interest in joining in the benefits of scientific collaboration and air pollution control.

The Convention has eight protocols and seven are already in force. They define commitments for

protecting the environment and human health and cutting emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Protocols for heavy metals and POPs have only recently entered into force and work is starting on their review and possible revision taking into account the latest scientific results. The eighth protocol, adopted in Gothenburg in 1999, is expected to enter into force soon.

➤ **Past successes and the future**

The Convention is one of the oldest multilateral international treaties protecting the environment. It is also one of the most successful and productive. The targets set in the Convention's protocols, for example, to achieve the same agreed environmental protection level in all countries, have led its Parties to cut drastically some of their emissions of air pollutants. Over the past 20 years sulphur dioxide emissions in Europe have plunged by more than 60 per cent and in North America they have more than halved. The result is that our environment is starting to recover from some of the effects of acidification.

Yet many challenges still lie ahead. Eutrophication, ground-level ozone, heavy metals and POPs, though already partly addressed by the Convention, will continue to demand action. Of special concern now are the effects of fine particles on human health and the Convention is taking steps to give these much greater consideration in the future.

And there is a further dimension to the work. Linking future air pollution cuts with climate change policies will undoubtedly present a great challenge since many of the pollutants or the processes emitting them are the same.

➤ **25th anniversary celebrations**

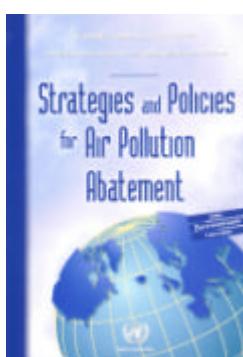


For the twenty-fifth anniversary there are events and activities, at both national and international levels, celebrating past successes and drawing attention to the work still needed for pollution control.

Some Parties, e.g. Canada, Germany, Norway, Poland and Sweden, plan to hold national events in November (the month the Convention was adopted) while the Executive Body for the Convention will hold a *special event* on 1 December in Geneva at the time of its annual session. Special scientific reports, the book on the Convention's history as well as new brochures on the Convention's work are to be produced for the occasion. The coming months will also see the release of games on air pollution to help draw attention to important air pollution issues.

The Convention's secretariat has so far received 26 statements of congratulations from Ministers for the Environment that draw attention to the important work of the Convention over the past 25 years.

Off the press ...



The 2002 review of Strategies and Policies for Air Pollution Abatement just issued assesses the progress made by Parties and the region as a whole in implementing obligations under the Convention and its protocols. Parties responded to a questionnaire which also asked for information on the integration of environmental policies with economic, transport, energy, waste management, spatial planning and other policy frameworks. Parties' reported emission data and other available information were also used to prepare the Review.

The replies provided by Parties are available on the Convention's web site:
<http://www.unece.org/env/eb/2002/questionnaire.htm>

Watch the Convention's web site (www.unece.org/env/lrtap) for further information on the 25th anniversary.

For further information on any of the above please contact Keith Bull at keith.bull@unece.org

Coming up soon ...

November

- 1-3 Working Group of Parties to the Aarhus Convention
- 2-4 Third International Conference on Agricultural Statistics (Cancun, Mexico)
- 2-5 Working Party on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs
- 3-4 Forum on Public-Private Cooperation in Industrial Restructuring (Almaty, Kazakhstan)
- 5 Team of Specialists on Industrial Restructuring (Almaty, Kazakhstan)
- 3-5 Joint ECE/UNODC Work Session on Crime Statistics
- 3-5 Implementation Committee of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context

For further information please contact:
Information Service,
UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41(0)22 917 44 44
E-mail: info.ece@unece.org

Fax: +41(0)22 917 05 05
Web site: <http://www.unece.org>