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NEW TREATY ON POLLUTANTS ENTERS INTO FORCE ON 8 OCTOBER



The *Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers* to the UNECE *Aarhus Convention*, adopted in May 2003 in Kiev enters into force on 8 October 2009. The Protocol will help identify the biggest polluters in communities across Europe, including those spewing greenhouse gases, which contribute to climate change.

Sixteen countries and the European Community which have already deposited their instruments of ratification with the United Nations Secretary-General will become Parties to the treaty upon its entry into force. By year end, a total of 20 countries are set to become Parties to the treaty.

The *Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers* requires firms to report annually on releases into the environment and transfers off-site of 86 pollutants, including greenhouse gases, dioxins and heavy metals such as mercury. The information will then be placed on a public register accessible through the Internet. Smaller, widespread sources such as traffic, agriculture and small- and medium-sized enterprises will also be captured in the national pollutant registers. Where registers already exist, public disclosure of information about pollutant releases has led companies to improve their environmental performance.

Firms engaged in international trafficking of hazardous waste must report the name and address of the waste's receiver (in accordance with article 7 (5)(d)(ii)). The Protocol will thus offer new tools to track the transport of hazardous waste, which is often destined for developing countries.

The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) seeks to promote greater transparency and accountability among government bodies by guaranteeing public rights of access to environmental information, providing for public involvement in environmental decision-making and requiring the establishment of procedures enabling the public to challenge environmental decisions. The Aarhus Convention was adopted in the Danish city of Aarhus in June 1998 and entered into force in October 2001. The Convention has 43 Parties.

For more information visit <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr.htm> or contact Michael Stanley-Jones (public.participation@unece.org).

Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, said the Protocol "marks a milestone in the advancement towards environmental democracy. The Protocol counts 38 Signatories and 21 ratifications in the UNECE region, but many other countries are applying its right-to-know principles and developing pollutant release and transfer registers."

Ján Kubiš, UNECE Executive Secretary, described this new international law as "a key tool for citizens and public authorities to measure and combat environmental pollution. The Protocol, which covers major greenhouse gas emissions, will thus contribute to UNECE's efforts to mitigate climate change in our region."

The Protocol is open to accession by any United Nations Member State. Spain is the most recent country to ratify the Protocol, having deposited its ratification on 24 September 2009. ■

WORKSHOP TO PROMOTE CYCLING AND WALKING IN CITIES

Finding sustainable and alternative ways to move about in urban areas — such as "human-powered mobility" like cycling and walking — was the topic of a workshop held outside Prague on 24-25 September. Cycling and walking are examples of environmentally-friendly modes of transport that contribute to lower greenhouse gas emissions in cities, have a low impact on urban congestion and are a boost to human health.

Around half of the trips we make with our cars are shorter than 5 km and a third are less than 3 km. Many of these trips could be made by public transport or by walking and cycling. As a rule of thumb, walking is suitable for distances of up to 1 km or 15 minutes; and cycling for distances of up to 5 km or 20 minutes.

A systemic approach to human-powered mobility requires new thinking by transport and city planners. It requires initiatives and support from national Governments — municipalities cannot do it alone. It requires an integration of car parks, public transport and walking and cycling networks and appropriate infrastructure. It requires education, training for motorists and cyclists and a change in public perception. And it requires money and the political will to do things differently.

The workshop identified strategies, policies and measures to promote innovative policies to support walking and cycling as increasingly viable and attractive modes of urban mobility. It followed a High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment, hosted by the Netherlands, where more than 30 Governments across the UNECE and WHO-Europe region agreed the Amsterdam Declaration and four priority goals, including



reduced emissions of greenhouse gases and noise, clean and efficient public transport, and effective mobility management schemes. ■

For more information contact the UNECE-WHO/Europe joint secretariat at secretariat@thepep.org, www.thepep.org.

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UNECE MANDATED TO ADDRESS MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN CITIES

A thorough review of tools and projects aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption in cities was held in Geneva on Climate Neutral Day, 23 September 2009. The seminar, entitled "Climate Neutral Cities", showcased examples of forward-looking planning strategies, building projects and urban management practices that reduce emissions, increase the performance of buildings and cities and improve the quality of life for citizens throughout the UNECE region.

The seminar was part of the 70th session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management. Given the importance of the topics discussed and their relevance for the Committee's work, member States decided to develop a study on the topic including guidance on mitigation and adaptation strategies for urban areas. The study will provide practical solutions for a move towards sustainable and climate-neutral building, construction and planning practices in urban areas. It will offer guidance will be developed to a range of urban actors, from nation and local governments to practitioners and citizens.



The issue of climate neutrality in cities is an integral part of the Committee's work on improving urban environmental performance. The session also discussed a number of related issues, including the current work on energy efficiency in housing, which will lead to the development of an Action Plan on Energy Efficiency in Housing in the UNECE region. An international forum to develop the Action Plan will be held in Vienna from 23 to 25 November 2009 (see <http://www.energy-housing.net>).

The Committee also addressed the issue of building and construction safety as it relates to natural disasters such as earthquakes and to

extreme weather events. An international conference on this topic will be organized by UNECE in cooperation with the Government of Azerbaijan in the second half of 2010.

A number of other workshops are planned on informal settlements, urban sprawl and multi-family housing and an in-depth assessment will be undertaken of the housing sector of Tajikistan as one of its [Country Profiles](#). ■

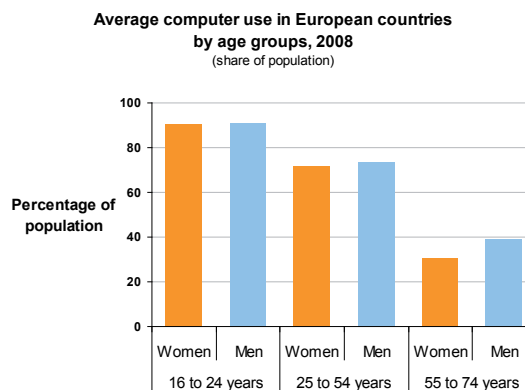
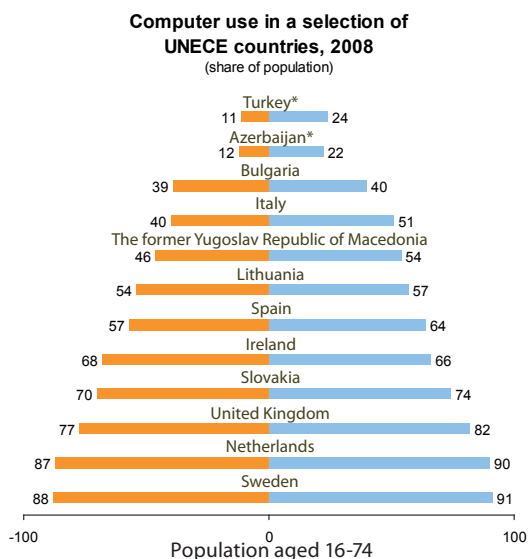
For more information visit <http://www.iisd.ca/ymb/hlm70/> or contact Paola Deda (housing.landmanagement@unece.org).

FACTS AND FIGURES

MINIMAL GENDER DIFFERENCE IN COMPUTER USE

There is little difference in the proportion of women and men who use computers. Differences are more pronounced between age groups than between genders, with older people less likely to use computers. With an increasing number of services, such as personal banking, submission of government forms and payment of bills, provided through Internet applications, the use of computers is a part of everyday life for many citizens, possibly regardless of whether they use a computer at work.

Computer use is increasing overall, with a number of UNECE member countries reporting that in 2008 more than 60% of the population used a computer in the last three months. This represents around a 10% increase in usage compared to 2004. In countries such as Sweden and Netherlands, around 90% of both women and men use computers. In Turkey, usage is low with just under one quarter of the male population using computers and only 11% of women. Differences between age groups are evident in most countries, as shown in the chart on average use. ■



Source: UNECE Statistical Database (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data>) and Eurostat
Note: Data refer to the proportion of persons aged 16-74 who used a computer in the last three months, over the total number of corresponding sex and age group population.
* Data refer to 2006.