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## UNECE CONVENTION CONTINUES THE FIGHT AGAINST AIR POLLUTION DURING ANNUAL WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

As the [Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution](#) approaches its landmark 30th anniversary, the three subsidiary bodies to the Convention's Executive Body as well as the Implementation Committee held their annual meetings in Geneva in September 2009.

### AN EFFECT-BASED APPROACH

The [Working Group on Effects](#) convenes annually with a focus upon sharing new scientific data and research regarding the impacts of air pollution. Delegates reviewed emissions standards, innovative methods of monitoring and modelling the harmful effects of air pollution. The Working Group is composed of numerous task forces and international cooperative programmes (ICPs) and a joint expert group, all of which presented their most recent findings that will be used for developing the new policies of the Convention.

The ICP on Waters presented new research with respect to biological recovery in lakes/ rivers, where it was clear that many sites in Europe still remain acidified, requiring continued action. Several ICPs emphasized that the persisting problem due to atmospheric pollution is the continuing accumulation of nutrient nitrogen in the ecosystems. This leads to unwanted changes in vegetation and reduces the species richness. Long-term monitoring of such effects revealed that air pollution required further emission cuts to prevent loss of biodiversity.

The ICP on Materials in their report on the effects of air pollution on cultural heritage exemplified the continued impacts of air pollutants on monuments across the region, especially in Italy and Greece, where monuments play a crucial role in the tourism industry. With many climate change policies advocating the use of alternative energy sources, the impact from the use of inefficient technologies, poor fuel quality and outdated burning techniques in biomass combustion has become visible. In response, the Joint Task Force on the Health Aspects of Air Pollution (in cooperation with the World Health Organization) presented research showing the health impacts of particulate matter (PM 2.5) emissions from the burning of biomass. These health effects included an increase in respiratory illness and asthma, and a subsequent reduction in life expectancy.

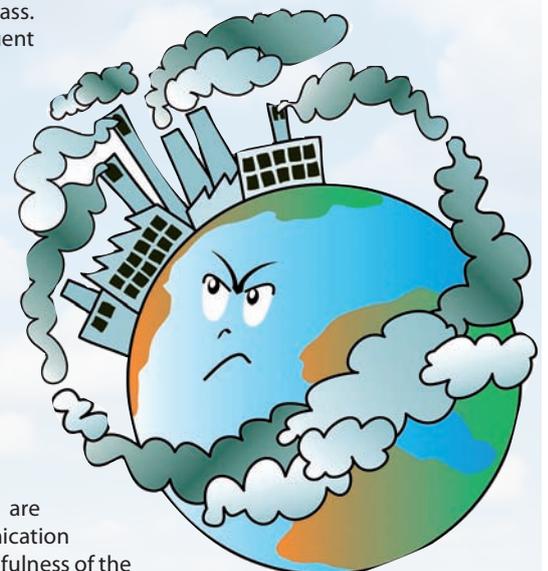
### MAPPING AND MODELLING OF AIR POLLUTION

The [Steering Body to the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-Range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe \(EMEP\)](#) conducted a series of discussions and decisions on atmospheric monitoring and modelling, emission inventories and projections, as well as the integrated assessment of air pollution. The outcomes of the session exemplified EMEP as the pre-eminent scientific network of atmospheric research and monitoring which supports the policy development under the Convention.

A detailed review of the activities of the scientific EMEP Centres and Task Forces which are supporting the on-going revision of the obligations of Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol) confirmed the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the integrated assessment model used. Although the modelling framework has improved considerably in the

The 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, which entered into force in 1983, is one of the central means for protecting our environment. It has, over the years, served as a bridge between different political systems and as a factor of stability in years of political change. It has substantially contributed to the development of international environmental law and has created the essential framework for controlling and reducing the damage to human health and the environment caused by transboundary air pollution. It is a successful example of what can be achieved through intergovernmental cooperation.

The Convention was the first international legally binding instrument to deal with problems of air pollution on a broad regional basis. Besides laying down the general principles of international cooperation for air pollution abatement, the Convention sets up an institutional framework bringing together research and policy.





past years, further work is still necessary to improve the monitoring of particulate matter exposure, eutrophication of ecosystems, and the links between ozone exposure and climate change.

The Steering Body adopted a new strategy for EMEP for 2010-2019, outlining the main scientific goals together with the actions and methodological approaches to reach them, as well as emerging issues and concerns to be taken into account. The revised 10-year strategy for EMEP spells out the requirements for the monitoring of atmospheric concentrations and deposition rates by Parties. An updated EMEP/EEA Air Pollutant Emission Inventory Guidebook was also adopted. It provides detailed guidance on estimating emissions from both anthropogenic and natural emission sources. The aim is to facilitate reporting of emission inventories by countries both under the Convention and the EU's National Emission Ceiling Directive.

## ENSURING INTERNATIONAL COMPLIANCE

Aimed at effectively reviewing compliance by Parties with their obligations under the protocols of the Convention, the *Implementation Committee* focused on providing the Executive Body with updates on member countries which were not in full compliance with their obligations to the Protocols.

The *Protocol on Nitrogen Oxides* continues to be a challenge for Cyprus, Greece and Spain, which were encouraged to increase their actions with respect to reducing emissions and remaining in compliance. Spain also missed the emissions targets set out by the *Protocol on Volatile Organic Compounds*. In response, the Implementation Committee has assisted Spain in identifying key problem areas.

The Committee also requested that the Executive Body recognize Denmark's failure to remain in compliance with the *Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants*, in particular polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). This issue exemplifies the complex nature of dealing with air pollutants, as the rising PAH emissions were due to domestic policies urging citizens to use wood combustion as a method of heating (as a response to promoting alternative energy sources). The increase in such combustion has inadvertently increased PAH levels, and the Committee is now focused upon gaining further insight into the steps Denmark will undertake to regain compliance and assisting them in this process.

Overall, the Implementation Committee established its role as an influential body committed to ensuring that all member countries are following the targets established under the Convention. Furthermore, it continued its mission of extending expertise and guidance to the member States facing challenges in compliance.

## USING SCIENCE TO MAKE POLICY

The *Working Group on Strategies and Review* exemplified its commitment to ensuring effective and sufficient abatement of long-range transboundary air pollution in the UNECE region by making considerable progress in the review and revision of the obligations of the three most recent Protocols to the Convention: *Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)*, *Heavy Metals* and *Gothenburg*. In particular, it completed its negotiations on options for revising the Protocol on POPs, covering revision of its current provisions, adding new substances to it as well as providing an increased amount of time to facilitate the ratification of the Protocol by countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The negotiated text will be submitted for adoption by Parties to the Protocol on POPs meeting within the Executive Body session in December 2009.

These renegotiations come at an important time, as a number of countries in transition have not yet ratified these protocols.

In addition to stricter targets, the negotiations also aim to include some flexibility within the targets to provide an opportunity for the East European nations to ratify the protocols and establish their own framework for combating air pollution. While the intention is to maintain ambitious targets for the whole region, giving countries in transition more time to comply with the protocols' requirements provides them with the opportunity to get rid of obsolete technology and introduce best available technologies to effectively reduce their emissions.

The Convention's Secretariat presented a series of policy questions for the Working Group with the aim of gaining better insight to further analyse the current situation regarding air pollution abatement in the region.

