

Transport

UNECE WP.29 secretariat receives award from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the United States of America awarded a plaque to the UNECE WP.29 Secretariat on 27 June in recognition of its "outstanding contribution to advancing global technical regulations for motor vehicle safety under the 1998 Global Agreement." The plaque was offered by David L. Strickland, Administrator of the NHTSA, at the 160th session of the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29), held from 25 – 28 June at the Palais des Nations.

In presenting the plaque, Mr. Strickland acknowledged the "enormous and important work" of the UNECE WP.29 Secretariat, a "relatively small team of dedicated individuals providing support and expertise to the meetings of all Working Groups."

Juan Ramos, Secretary of the World Forum, thanked Mr. Strickland and said: "this award belongs not only to the current team of the Secretariat (Ms. Bachelard, Ms. Boudol, Ms. Caillot, Mr. Hubert, Mr. Gianotti, Mr. Cazzola and Mr. Guichard) but also to the former members of the WP.29 Secretariat." He specifically mentioned Mr. Jerie, Mr. Rabar, Ms. Sisante and Ms. Enonler. He stated that the Secretariat has been and would continue to be committed to providing high-quality services to WP.29 and its six subsidiary Working Parties.

Mr. Strickland acknowledged the benefits of contracting parties' and industry stakeholders' technical expertise provided under the aegis of WP.29. As he asserted, commitment to data and experience sharing serves as a powerful resource contributing to the development of a comprehensive set of global technical vehicle regulations which will permit consumers to know that vehicles produced according to global regulations "are the most advanced in terms of safety, fuel efficiency, and environmental protection." □

Aarhus Convention: ever more relevant across sectors and regions

Openness, transparency and a wide participatory approach are the foundational principles underlying the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention). Ignoring them can have grave consequences for the environment, but can also be costly and lead to instability both for Governments and for businesses, especially in times of financial crisis and resource constraints.

To address these issues, the Convention's Working Group of the Parties at its sixteenth meeting held in Geneva, from 19 to 21 June 2013, considered the progress in the implementation of the Convention and heard several disturbing reports from the public. These included the wide-scale massacre of migratory birds as a result of a British Petroleum oil accident in the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan, about which the public was kept in the dark; nuclear and shale gas-related decisions in Ukraine where the public was kept out of talks; the release of genetically modified seeds onto the market in the Republic of Moldova without consulting the public; and a lack of clarity with regard to access to justice-associated costs in the United Kingdom.

Welcoming prospective Parties and inspiring other regions

On the positive side, Switzerland and the Republic of Moldova announced that they were finalizing their ratification processes and expected to join the Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers soon. In a wider development, Chile and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean reported on progress in deliberations of countries in that region to create their own instrument similar to the Convention.

Aarhus Parties — ambassadors of environmental democracy

A thematic session on promoting the Convention's principles in international forums provided an opportunity for Parties, stakeholders and representatives of international forums to discuss how to make international environmental decision-making more transparent, participatory and effective. The session discussed concrete actions Parties might take to promote more effective public participation in the new United Nations Environment Assembly and in the policies of international financial institutions, many of which are currently under review. Public participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the new High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the new European forestry agreement were also discussed. Representatives from the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank took part in the session, and the secretariats for the UNFCCC and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs provided statements to the session. Given the wide range of subjects discussed, it is hoped that the outcomes of the session will have a far-reaching effect for international environmental governance across the globe.

Discussing future directions

The meeting also discussed the Convention's strategic directions up to 2020 and a number of items in preparation for the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to be hosted by the Netherlands in June 2014. □

For more information, please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/wgp16.html>.

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UNECE adopts global technical regulation on the safety of hydrogen and fuel cell vehicles

UNECE's World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29) adopted on 27 June a United Nations Global Technical Regulation (UN GTR) governing the safety of hydrogen and fuel cell-powered vehicles (HFCVs). This new UN GTR represents the first international legislation in this field.

HFCVs can use either internal combustion engines fuelled by liquefied hydrogen or fuel-cells fuelled by compressed gaseous hydrogen. Hydrogen fuelled vehicles are typically powered by fuel-cell power systems which generate electric power electrochemically. The UN GTR specifies provisions to ensure that such vehicles attain the same safety level as conventional gasoline vehicles. The high-voltage safety provisions adopted today for HFCVs can be used in the future UN GTR that the World Forum is preparing to encompass all types of electric vehicles (irrespective of the technology used to generate power).

The adoption of this new UN GTR could help foster interest in HFCVs, in view of the potential benefits of this technology with regard to:

- Energy efficiency. Thanks to the elimination of the engine's mobile parts, such as pistons, HFCVs generally achieve between 40–60% energy efficiency, compared to 25% in conventional internal combustion engine vehicles.
- Emissions reduction. HFCVs do not produce harmful tailpipe emissions. They could thus help reduce vehicles' emissions of harmful gaseous pollutants, provided some bottlenecks are overcome. These include: (i) the safe and economically-sound mass production of hydrogen from sources other than fossil fuels, (ii) the development of refuelling infrastructures and (iii) safe mass-scale transportation of hydrogen.

The text of the UN GTR, which takes into account existing standards and regulations from Canada, China, the European Union, Japan, Korea and the United States, is available at:

<http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/doc/2013/wp29/ECE-TRANS-WP29-2013-041e.pdf> □

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UNECE trains energy efficiency project developers

After a first session in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in April, UNECE conducted its second international training course on Business Planning for Energy Efficiency (EE) Projects in Istanbul, Turkey, on 20-21 June 2013.

Over 80 participants from 23 countries attended at least one course, and almost 40 attended both courses. The programme is designed to help representatives of private and public companies from South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central, Northern, South-Eastern and Southern Asia, as well as the Russian Federation and Turkey better prepare and implement EE projects, including receiving access to commercial financing. It also aims at raising awareness about EE investments among financing organizations including through public-private partnerships. In Almaty, participants were trained to improve their financial engineering and business planning skills to identify, select and develop EE investment projects and prepare bankable project proposals. The session was followed by individual on-line consultations.

In Istanbul, 18 participants from 15 countries made presentations on their progress in developing project proposals resulting from their participation in the first Training Course in Almaty. The project proposals were reviewed by the training facilitator who provided a preliminary analysis of the proposals and presented it to the audience. An extended interactive presentation on business planning and preparing project documentation for EE projects built upon the information provided at the first course in Almaty. At both courses, representatives of development and commercial banks, credit institutions, international organizations and business companies presented their experience and practices in financing EE projects.

Project developers and owners will continue working on their project proposals and will receive further advice. A workshop on the analysis of the project pipeline where the project proposals will be reviewed will take place in early 2014.

The training courses were co-organized by UNECE and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which are implementing, jointly with the other UN Regional Commissions, the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project "Promoting energy efficiency investments for climate change mitigation and sustainable development" as part of the Global Energy Efficiency 21 (GEE21) Project.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices in Kazakhstan and Turkey, the Central Asian Energy Efficiency Support Program (CAEESP) financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MENR) of Turkey were partners for the events in Almaty and Istanbul and provided financial, logistical and substantive contribution to the organization of the training courses. □

Materials of the training courses are available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32455> (Almaty)
<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32820> (Istanbul)

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