

Webinar “Clean Air For All – Lessons learnt from the UNECE Air Convention”
7 September 2020
Questions and answers

Question 1: To be sure for the degree of air pollution we should measure the pollution but most of measurement stations are under state control and they are out of order almost half year . What should we do to have correct and transparent figures ?

Answer: Across the EU, Member States have established an air quality monitoring network with some 16000 sampling points for specific pollutants (often grouped at more than 4000 monitoring stations) based on common criteria defined by the AAQ Directives. This extensive network can be considered a success in itself. Concerns have been raised that the criteria on monitoring offer too much leeway and present some ambiguity to competent authorities, resulting in instances where air quality monitoring does not live up to the criteria set by the AAQ Directives. A key challenge here is to ascertain that air quality sampling points indeed provide information for where the highest concentrations of air pollutants occur. This, however, does not appear to amount to systemic shortcomings in the EU-wide monitoring network. Overall, the monitoring network by and large adheres to the provisions of the AAQ Directives, and ensures that reliable and representative air quality data is available.

Question 2: Do you think that Environmental Impact Assessment can be of help to address the issues on air pollution that adversely affects the human health. What can you suggest to improve this planning tool?

Answer:

- The EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (the EIA Directive) is a very relevant tool to identify, describe and assess effects on a number of environmental factors, including human health, at project level. For projects for which it has to be decided if they need to undergo an EIA (listed in Annex II), one of the criteria is the risks to human health due to air pollution. For projects undergoing EIA (listed in Annex I and for Annex II projects for which it is decided that need an EIA), the developers of the projects have to prepare a comprehensive report on environmental impacts (including on human health) which is subject to consultations with authorities and the public concerned. When a decision is taken for such projects, the respective competent authority needs to take into account the results of these consultations and if the project will have significant effects on the environment (including human health), set conditions in this respect. The EIA Directive was amended in 2014 with the aim to inter alia strengthen the quality of the EIA procedure and enhance coherence and synergies with other Union legislation and policies. Proper implementation of the Directive by the EU Member States is key to ensure the achievement of high level of protection of the environment and human health.
- Another relevant legal instrument in the EU is the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (SEA Directive) which applies to certain public plans and programmes (for example for energy, industry and transport sectors). It contributes to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of such plans and programmes with a view to reduce their environmental impact. Human health is one of the environmental factors that needs to be considered during SEA.

Question 3: As scientists, we sometimes have complex/subtle messages, and the Convention covers many different technical areas. Do we need to improve our communications from the Convention, to better "market" our findings to non-experts?

Answer:

Better communication is generally a good idea, to ensure successful outreach and awareness raising to citizens, policy-makers, etc.

Question 4: How did the EU countries effectively mitigate Dioxin and Furans emission from Municipal Waste to Energy (WTE) projects ?

Answer:

- Waste incineration plants, irrespective on their capacities, are regulated in the EU by Chapter IV of Directive 2010/75/EU on Industrial Emissions (IED), see <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010L0075&from=EN>. The Directive contains specific emission limit values and monitoring provisions for dioxin and furans in parts 2, 3 and 6 of its Annex VI.
- The IED also requires all installation performing activities listed in its Annex I to operate in accordance with permits based on the use of Best Available Techniques (BAT). BAT conclusions adopted at EU level are the mandatory reference for competent authorities when issuing or reviewing permits for an installation carrying out an activity within their scope.
- The Commission Implementing Decision containing the BAT conclusions for waste incineration is published on 3rd December 2019: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_2018.208.01.0038.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2018%3A208%3ATOC. Existing installations are obliged to comply with the BAT AELs for dioxin and furans (BAT 30) within a maximum of 4 years after its publication.

Question 5: I have a question regarding to the role of international organizations, the IASA for example, to harmonize different air quality improvement needs of individual countries toward a regional collaborationship.

Answer: IASA and similar organizations help e.g. with the modelling work underpinning policy decisions. Harmonization of air quality aspects to facilitate regional collaboration has been done by the EU for the EU Member States and within the UNECE Air Convention framework for the wider UNECE region.