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Joint press release with the Federal Environment Ministry

Environmental awareness among Germans is high

Federal Environment Ministry and UBA present new study

The environmental awareness of Germans remains at a high level: 91 percent of the population rates environmental protection as important, according to the results of a new study on environmental awareness in Germany which was commissioned by the German Federal Environment Ministry and the Federal Environment Agency (UBA). The study also points out that consciousness of the risks and consequences of global warming is very high. Well over 80 percent of respondents is apprehensive about the high costs that Germany will incur to repair damages or for protection against the consequences of climate change. At the same time, the number of people who believe the effects of climate change in Germany are manageable rose from 39 percent in 2006 to 54 percent.

Parliamentary State Secretary of the German Federal Ministry of Environment, Astrid Klug, said, "This show of optimism enhances the foundation of goal-oriented environmental policy. I am happy that more and more people understand that environmental protection is about shaping our future, and that they are calling for systematic ecological modernisation."

Dr. Harry Lehmann, Head of the Environmental Planning and Sustainability Strategies Division at UBA, stated, "The public's willingness to act is on hand.

It is the task of politicians as well as the Federal Environment Agency to devote more energy to environmental communication that is appropriate for its target group. It is vital to define opportunities for action that are easy to understand and comprehend. We must make use of this positive public sentiment towards environmental protection and illustrate its impact on people's quality of life."

Citizens are also very concerned about the rising cost of energy. The current survey asked for the first time how important they felt it was to relieve financial pressure by lowering energy costs. Agreement to this policy proposal was as strong as with the job of stimulating the economy. Astrid Klug comments, "I take these expectations very seriously. Rising electricity and energy prices could potentially bring about social decline, even among the middle class.

Therefore, our policy of increasing energy efficiency and taking advantage of great energy saving potential is on the mark. It represents an important step towards achieving more social equity."

There is a lot of confidence placed in technological innovation as a solution to the problem. Some three-quarters of respondents expect increased economic competitiveness as a result of ambitious environmental protection policy. Nevertheless, the public does not simply dismiss its personal responsibility: a large majority agreed with the statement that we must all change our everyday habits.

Public awareness of the significance of biological diversity is also high. 90 percent believe that preservation of natural habitats is vital to nature and mankind. Generational justice is seen as the best argument for the maintenance of biodiversity, although the significance of natural habitats as sites for recreation, and preventative health care by association, is also rated as important. Respondents perceive overall close correlation between environmental protection and health.

The 2008 study of environmental awareness applied the Sinus Institute's social environment models, which help to gain information about the public which might improve environmental communications directed at them. The study's authors are Carsten Wippermann and Marc Calmbach (SINUS Institute) and Silke Kleinhüchelkotten (ECOLOG Institute).

Note: The environmental awareness study 2008 is available on the Internet (in German) at www.umweltbundesamt.de/umweltbewusstsein. Previous studies are also listed on the site.

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