

Press Release No. 22/2011

Press Relations Officer: Martin Ittershagen
Deputy Press Relations Officer: Stephan Gabriel Haufe
PR-staff: Fotini Mavromati, Martin Stallmann, Marc Rathmann, Uwe Weber (office)
Telephone: +49 340/2103 -2122, -6625, -2318, -2250, -2507, -2637
Address: Postfach 1406, 06813 Dessau-Roßlau
Email: pressestelle@uba.de
Internet: www.umweltbundesamt.de
Internet: www.fuer-mensch-und-umwelt.de



Approaching environmental protection as a global task

Federal Environment Agency publishes *Schwerpunkte 2011* annual report

The nuclear accident at Fukushima, Japan, and its unforeseen impact on mankind and the environment have put into focus the urgency of making major changes in how the economy is run and in our lifestyles. The way to the future is a life that is low-carbon, energy-efficient, and which makes conservative use of resources—at the national, regional and international level. “The signals sent by ambitious environmental policy at the national level can also promote the transition to a green economy in other countries,” said the President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA), Jochen Flasbarth, upon publication of the *Schwerpunkte 2011* report in Berlin. According to forecasts, the global market volume for the main “green” future markets is set to double in size: from 1.4 billion euros in 2007 to 3.1 billion euros in 2020.

It is becoming ever more clear that the solution to global environmental issues such as climate change or the increasing consumption of raw materials can only be addressed in international cooperation—that is, by means of globally binding treaties, targets and measures. This will require lending stronger support to international organisational structures in environmental protection. “Ever since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 the scope of environmental protection has reached beyond national borders. A lot has been achieved in the meantime, but we are still far removed from worldwide sustainable development,” declared Flasbarth. “UBA is calling for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to be upgraded to a specialised agency and to transform the UN Commission on Sustainable Development into a Sustainable Development Council as a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly. It would act as the foundation for global governance of the environment.”

Sustainable management of the Earth’s water resources is an additional focus area of the UBA report. The European Water Framework Directive establishes standard requirements for the protection of rivers, lakes and coastal waters. More than ten percent of Germany’s surface waters already achieve either “very good” or “good ecological status”. Another 88 percent of surface waters and 63 percent of groundwater even achieve “good chemical status”. New construction and extension of existing waste water treatment facilities, together with the introduction of phosphate-free laundry detergents, have helped to improve the chemical quality of surface waters markedly.

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One major reason for targets currently not being achieved is agricultural practices that are not nearly ecological enough. Overfertilisation of seas and many lakes as well as the high levels of nitrate contamination in groundwater can be traced to nutrient inputs from agriculture, which has been amplified by the increased rate of biomass crop-growing, especially maize. It will be crucial to integrate water protection requirements in a future amendment to the Renewable Energies Act (EEG) and in the imminent reforms to EU agricultural policy.

Environmental healthcare is a core action area of environmental politics. In Germany, statutory regulations have supported improvement of environmental quality and protection of human health. Air pollution by lead and sulphur dioxide emissions are negligible, whereas other risk factors have become more pronounced—chemicals, contaminated products, or poor air quality in indoor spaces, for example. Chemicals are transported across large areas via air, water and through international trade. Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in particular pose a global problem. At the same time, chemicals play a significant economic role, with some 500 million tonnes produced worldwide and more growth in this area expected.

The United Nations have declared 2011 as International Year of Chemistry. "If we seek sustainable protection of mankind and the environment against hazardous chemicals, we must raise awareness that chemicals management is a core part of a green economy," demanded Flasbarth. Europe already has rigorous harmonised standards. A few such examples are REACH Chemicals Regulation and an established state of the art in environmental technology, says UBA's President. The target must be to provide information about the risks and standards of sustainable chemicals management at an international level.

The annual Schwerpunkte 2011 UBA publication is available for free in print form from Gemeinnützige Werkstätten Bonn, Postfach 30 03 61, 53183 Bonn; Service phone: 0340/2103 66 88, email: uba@broschuerenversand.de. An English language version will be available soon.

To download the report go here:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/3972.html>

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