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Taking a very close look at industrial enterprises

New online portal *Thru.de* provides information on environmental quality in Germany

How much pollution does the factory in my neighbourhood produce? What chemicals are being released in wastewater to treatment facilities? Answers to these and many other questions can now be found on www.thru.de, the new web pages of Germany's Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR). The Internet portal has information about the volumes of pollutants that industrial facilities are emitting to the environment and how much waste they are disposing outside their facilities. Thru.de replaces the previous PRTR site which was set up in June 2009. Unlike its user-unfriendly PRTR predecessor, the new portal will allow the general public to more easily access information about the quality of the environment in their immediate surroundings. "The new internet portal thru.de does greater justice to the goal of the Federal Environment Agency to create more transparency in environmental protection," said UBA's Vice President, Dr. Thomas Holzmann. "Thanks to close cooperation with the responsible authorities at *Länder* level, the Internet portal provides reliable data on environmental pollution and reports about waste volumes."

The information is provided by nearly 5,000 enterprises which are subject to reporting their emissions in accordance with the European PRTR Regulation. The types of companies that have a reporting obligation are power plants, refineries, chemical companies, the food industry, as well as landfills and wastewater treatment plants. These companies are obliged to report their emissions either when they exceed a certain total volume, if they emit significant amounts of a pollutant or if they dispose of a great deal of waste off-site. The PRTR Regulation also establishes emission thresholds for air, water, soil and also for wastewater effluent at off-site treatment facilities. Operators also have reporting duties if they dispose of at least two tons of hazardous waste per year or more than 2,000 tons of non-hazardous waste.

The transparency of PRTR data promotes knowledge of environmental protection. For example, data quality has been improved by filling gaps in data - which results when an inquiry is made about why a certain company is not listed. Many users apply the data in independent research or incorporate it into other reports. The software that companies use to record their data and which is then forwarded to the authorities is called BUBE. Its development is the result of a project co-financed by the *Länder* and the Federal Environment Agency (UBA). The reported data is then

reviewed by the appropriate authorities. "There will soon be more information on emissions from the traffic sector and agriculture," said UBA's Vice-President Dr. Thomas Holzmann. "The launch of the Thru.de portal is merely one step towards becoming more credible and more transparent in the area of environmental protection."

The new portal is remarkable because of its user-friendly design, which is informative and pleasing to the eye. In addition to modern design, Thru.de features an optimized map, advanced search functions and background information. Its design and interactive map were developed in a contest by students of design at the Anhalt University of Applied Sciences. The site unites easy navigation and clear page layout with attractive, accessible colours and expressive graphics. The map can be zoomed in or out to show comprehensive information on the number and sector which industries operate in at *Land* or county level, thereby allowing comparisons between regions. A local or advanced search on the subject of "emissions in brief," which enables a quick overview of emissions in individual industrial sectors, rounds off what the portal has to offer. All of the data available on thru.de can be downloaded and is available to the general public.

Click here <http://www.thru.de> to go to the portal.

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