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What is the state of environmental protection in Germany?

Updated Environmental Key Indicators now posted on the Internet

What progress is being made in Germany in the area of environmental protection? The now updated Environmental Key Indicator System (*German: KIS*) of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) has the answers. More than 50 indicators describe the state of the environment and point to the successes of environmental policy as well as to areas where there is more to be done. Germany got high marks in 2008 for climate protection and expansion of renewable energies. In addition, energy and resource productivity have grown. "However, we may not rest upon the laurels of this success", said UBA Vice President Dr. Thomas Holzmann. Therefore, Germany must continue—despite improved energy and natural resources productivity— to reduce its absolute consumption thereof. The transport sector must become more sustainable, and clean air policy goals of achieving a high level of health protection and preservation of biodiversity still require great effort. As concerns reduction of land consumption and the development of organic farming, Germany still falls short of its goals.

A few bits of concrete evidence of the positive development of environmental protection follow:

Greenhouse gas emissions declined by 23.3 percent in the period 1990-2008. Germany's reduction goal of 21 percent over 1990 levels, to be reached by 2012, has thereby already been achieved.

The proportion of power generated from renewable energies in the electricity grid was roughly 14.8 percent in 2008. The 12.5 percent goal set for 2010 has thus been surpassed.

Energy productivity increased by 40.7 percent from 1990 to 2008. Further efforts are needed to achieve the goal of doubling that level by 2020 over 1990 levels.

Raw materials productivity rose by 35.4 percent from 1994 to 2007, with a decline in materials use of 9.7 percent and a rise in gross domestic product of 22.3 percent. The development of the indicator is positive, but the rate of development does not yet suffice to achieve the goal of doubling it over 1994 levels.

Compared to 1990 levels, the pollutant emissions index declined from 56 percent to 44 percent up until 2007. The goal set by the Federal Government is to achieve 30 percent by the year 2010. Further measures are also required in this area to reach this aim.

The following areas continue to require attention and great effort:

Passenger transport intensity sank to 95.6 percent between 1999 and 2006, whereas freight transport intensity climbed to 114 percent. The rate at which passenger transport intensity is decoupling from economic performance (gross domestic product, GDP) is still too slow. In the area of freight transport intensity the trend—contrary to the set goal— is developing in the opposite direction.

There was a 5.1 percent share of agricultural land used for organic farming in Germany in 2007. The Federal Government goal of 20 percent remains remote.

Nitrogen surpluses on agricultural land have declined by an overall 20 percent since 1991. In light of the remaining surplus of over 100 kilogrammes per hectare, the track record on nitrogen efficiency will not serve the purpose of achieving the goal of 80 kg/hectare by 2010. Daily land consumption for human settlements and transport infrastructure sank from 120 hectares/day to just under 100 hectares/day in the 1992-2007 period. The goal is to reduce growth of settlement and transport areas to 30 hectares/day by 2020. The country is still far from reaching this national sustainability strategy goal.

Species diversity and landscape quality have changed very little in the past ten years and are at 70 percent of the federal government's declared goal for 2015. Without considerable additional effort at the federal, state, and municipal levels in all political arenas if possible, this goal can not be reached.

Environmental indicators are an important instrument by which to measure the success of environmental policy. UBA works in close cooperation with other federal authorities when collecting data, for example the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) the Federal Office for Radiation Protection (BfS), and the Federal Statistical Office.

This update of the indicator system served as the occasion for UBA to make the webpage easier to navigate and more user-friendly. Several new functions refer site visitors to background information, related environmental subject areas, and to other links and further reading.

The Federal Environment Agency's Environmental Key Indicator System (in German) is located here: www.umweltbundesamt.de/daten-zur-umwelt/umwelt-kernindikatoren.

Environmental Data are available here: www.umweltbundesamt.de/daten-zur-umwelt.

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