

Press Release No. 17/2010

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World Water Day: Water quality must improve!

Federal Environment Agency evaluation of water protection plans

A mere ten percent of Germany's surface waters achieve "good ecological" status. On World Water Day UBA President Jochen Flasbarth said, "Many rivers, lakes and streams have become generally clean. Oxygen deficiency now occurs only rarely. However, there are still too many rivers and streams in Germany that have been narrowed and straightened. As a result, only a few bodies of water achieve positive ecological quality across the board." As a consequence of the channeling of rivers and streams, cataracts, gravel banks, flood plains and the natural diversity in habitats are lost. The biocoenoses typical of many water bodies along gravel riverbed courses or in flat water zones have been greatly transformed or have vanished altogether. Yet another problem is phosphorous and nitrogen, which at many sites is still fed into lakes and coastal waters on a large scale. Problems in groundwater also occur, namely due to nitrate used in agriculture.

On today's World Water Day the German Federal Ministry for Environment will submit its plans for water protection of Germany's ten river basin areas to the EU Commission. The EU Water Framework Directive stipulates that the *Laender* must demonstrate in so-called River Bed Management Plans how to enhance the ecological quality of water bodies. The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) is now evaluating these plans to gain an overview of water bodies' quality.

To improve water quality farmers should use less fertiliser and plant protection agents. Many water suppliers today are offering support in that some municipalities will, wherever necessary, expand small sewage treatment plants. They are also planning better rainwater management to retain nutrients and pollutants. Such preventative measures, which will benefit water bodies as well as drinking water quality, will be reflected in the price of water. UBA President Flasbarth warned, "Should cartel offices decree price cuts, as recently approved by the Federal Supreme Court, this may not have a negative impact on water quality."

Dessau-Roßlau, 22 March 2010