



Improved Management of Contaminated Aquifers by Integration of Source Tracking, Monitoring Tools and Decision Strategies



**INCOME workshop note 1: INCOME's Register of pollutants: a success story or a blind alley?**



## 1. INCOME WORKSHOP

### Note

On Thursday 14.10.2010, at the premises of JP VODOVOD-KANALIZACIJA, d. o. o., the workshop '*INCOME's Register of pollutants: a success story or a blind alley?*' was held. The aim of the workshop was to present to the professional and general public the results that the project INCOME has collected, so far, in a register of current and potential sources of pollution. At the same time, it endeavoured together with the participants of the workshop to find answers to unresolved issues raised during the formation of the register. The workshop was held from 9 until 12 in the morning, and was attended by 33 representatives from state institutions, local communities, municipal utilities and professions.

After a brief presentation of the project INCOME, followed by a presentation of the register of contaminants, the workshop continued with practical work, in which the participants divided into four project groups evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the register. They discussed in which areas the register is useful, in which areas of work it could still be used, which areas of the register are missing or are not properly developed, the role of local communities, government institutions and professions in forming such databases, who has greatest the interest in the register and who should be responsible for it, how to obtain the missing data that would trace chemicals from the importer or manufacturer to the end user, and what is the added value of the register compared with existing databases.

### HOW APPLICABLE IS THE REGISTER?

The workshop participants unanimously agreed that the register needs a guardian who will be responsible for updating data, its public availability, and compatibility with different databases, while it is also prudent to check possibilities of obtaining financial resources from the EC for maintaining the application.

The register, according to the workshop participants, is useful in various fields and for different purposes, namely:

- As a professional basis for emergency response to environmental situations.
- For inspections dealing with pollutant control and in case of accidents as the register can trace potential sources of pollution.
- As a professional basis for preparing measures for environmental and human health risk management in the event of environmental accidents.
- In the analysis of complete effects on water sources and the environment.
- In planning emission control.
- In preparing rehabilitation programmes for degraded environments.
- For monitoring environmental protection indicators.
- As one of the bases for proper spatial planning.
- For planning drinking water supply and managing water systems.

In addition to the above, the register can be employed as a useful educational tool.

### WHO ARE THE POTENTIAL USERS OF THE REGISTER ?

As part of their discussion, the workshop participants confirmed among potential users the registers of state and local institutions involved in monitoring the environment and spatial planning, research and educational institutions, developers and organisations employed with environmental impact assessment, and water systems operators.





## **WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE REGISTER?**

The main advantage of the register perceived by the workshop participants is that the information collected for different purposes is available at one place. They also believe that it is important that the register offers fast and easy access to information and links to different data sources.

Above all, the participants missed in the existing register data specificity such as parameters and their quantities. In their discussion, the participants mentioned areas they believe the register is missing. These are:

- Agriculture (agricultural holdings, application of nutrients and plant protective agents into soil, manure pits, irrigation systems),
- storage of hazardous materials,
- heating oil storage tanks,
- tourist facilities (e.g. pools),
- smaller service and craft activities,
- heat pumps,
- small municipal treatment plants,
- railways,
- car parks,
- fish farms.

The differentiation between septic tanks with drainage and holding tanks without drainage is also missing.

The participants also suggested that the register differentiates between contaminants that cause constant emissions and those that are likely to cause pollution.

## **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF STATE AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE FORMATION OF SUCH REGISTERS?**

According to the workshop participants, mostly state institutions hold a key role in forming such registers, while the role of local communities in their formation is limited by the legislation. Opinions are divided as to who should be responsible for the regulation of these areas in the register. Most workshop participants agreed that the responsibilities, particularly in terms of the current collection of environmental data, rest most likely with the Environmental Agency of the Republic of Slovenia as a body within the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. However, data is also collected by the institutions that are not organisational units of the Ministry (the Chemicals Office and Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia).

The participants at the workshop have also agreed that Slovenia needs to centralise environmental metadatabases, while requiring from the competent institutions responsible for the environment and population health to determine a node operator of environmental metadatabases, the type of incoming data and their carers, and methodology of acquiring and forming databases.

## **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSION IN THE FORMATION OF SUCH DATABASES?**

According to the workshop participants, the role of the profession should be oriented in the development of professional starting-points and guidelines for the efficient collection of environmental data and delivering professionally justified proposals. A critical assessment and persistency on professionally justified arguments, even when overridden by other interests is expected from the profession.





## **PARTIAL REPORTING AND ACCESS TO EXISTING DATA**

As the collection of environmental data is currently partial and therefore irrational, it is necessary to overhaul the legislation, to establish closer cooperation between ministries, and to establish mechanisms that will facilitate the work of data collectors and prevent the duplication of their work. Environmental data collection is not coordinated, which complicates their availability and use. Therefore, it would be necessary to verify the suitability of current environmental data collection with the aim of creating multipurpose databases.

The problem detected by the participants in the workshop, is also that the use of some key existing information is prohibited by legislative regulations, or the legislature invites the interpretation that environmental information is unavailable, which is used as a pretext for protecting data. The prohibition of using some existing environmental data is not economic, as an example we can cite data on heating oil storage tanks collected as part of the activities of Chimney sweeping services. Recent floods in Slovenia, pointed out that the heating oil storage tanks are a completely uncontrolled environmental problem. It would be irresponsible to plan the utilisation of public resources for data collection, for which the collection mechanism is already established, thus it is necessary to examine the advisability of prohibiting the use of some existing environmental data.

The workshop participants also agreed that the problem of unsuitable data collection may originate from incomplete regulations, and that is worth examining whether the existing legislation provides for the elimination of identified inconsistencies.

## **TRACKING OF HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS NOT ESTABLISHED**

Through planning and discussion, the workshop participants have confirmed the findings of the project partners that, if needed, Slovenia has no mechanism for facilitating immediate traceability of hazardous chemicals from the importer or manufacturer to the end user. Information on the current extent of hazardous substances used in production processes and services, or in storage, is not known. Recent environmental disasters in Slovenia and Hungary, warn that this field should be regulated as soon as possible, and raises the question of who is responsible for its organisation and in what ways can the missing data be obtained.

## **CONCLUSION OF THE WORKSHOP – A DECLARATION WITH A CALL FOR ACTION**

The participants concluded the meeting by proposing that the INCOME project group with the support of the workshop participants addresses a declaration to the competent institutions with a call for centralising metadatabases and establishing a methodology that will allow traceability of hazardous materials on the entire Slovenian territory at all times. They also agreed on inviting non-governmental environmental organisations to participate.

