

Environment – Sweden

Selected news

Sweden’s environmental objectives

In April 1999, the Swedish Parliament adopted fifteen national environmental quality objectives. The purpose of these objectives is to describe quality and state of the environment and the natural and cultural resources of Sweden that are ecologically sustainable in the long term. As guidance in the efforts to achieve the environmental quality objectives, the Government proposed interim targets for each of them in spring 2001. In a series of decisions during 2001 and 2002, the Parliament adopted a total of sixty-nine such targets, indicating the direction and time scale of the action to be taken.

The overall goal is that, one generation from now, the major environmental problems currently facing us will have been solved. This means that all the key measures required in Sweden need to be implemented by 2020 (2050 in the case of the objective pertaining to climate change). To achieve the “generation goal”, commitment in all sectors of society is required, both in Sweden and in other countries. An Environmental Objectives Council was set up in 2002 to coordinate efforts to achieve the goals. The Council monitors actions being taken and publishes a progress report in June each year. In this year’s report, “Sweden’s environmental objectives – will the interim targets be achieved?”, the Council presents its evaluation of progress so far towards the interim targets. Below are some examples of the Council’s conclusions.

According to the Environmental Objectives Council the most difficult objectives to achieve within the defined time frames are Reduced Climate Impact, A Non-Toxic Environment, Zero Eutrophication and Sustainable Forests. To attain all the objectives, substantial effort needs to be invested at every level over many years, by governmental agencies, the private sector, local authorities, non-governmental organizations and

individuals. Several of the objectives and targets also require action at an international level.

Even if additional action is taken, the interim targets regarding A Non-Toxic Environment, will be difficult to achieve by the target date according to the Council. Regarding data on the properties of chemical substances, and health and environmental information on dangerous substances in products, Sweden must give a strong lead in the ongoing development of new EC chemical rules since these are areas that are subject to EU-wide legislation. Phasing out particularly dangerous substances is crucial in reducing exposure to substances that could damage human health.

According to the report atmospheric concentrations of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and ground-level ozone are falling, as are Sweden's emissions of sulphur, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and ammonia. As a result, several interim targets relating to clean air, acidification and eutrophication can probably be met without further action beyond that already decided or planned. However, attention needs to be paid to road traffic in the major urban regions since there is a risk that street-level concentrations of nitrogen oxides and particulates could exceed recommended low-risk levels for a long time.

The Council states in the report that emissions of phosphorus to water have declined, but further reductions will be needed to meet the interim target under Zero Eutrophication. Measures to reduce discharges from single-household sewage systems, together with continuing efforts in agriculture, could help to achieve this target.

One of the targets relating to the objective A Good Built Environment calls for the environmental impact of energy use in residential and commercial buildings to be reduced according to the Council. Many property owners have switched from fossil fuels to other energy sources for heating, and use of these fuels at district heating plants has also decreased. The Council's assessment is that there is a good chance of attaining this target.

Governmental aid for local nature conservation projects

To fulfil the Swedish environmental objectives, the Government has issued an ordinance regarding governmental aid for local nature conservation projects. Under the ordinance, governmental aid may be given to one or more municipalities in order for them to carry out local nature conservation projects. To receive such aid, the project must – from a local perspective – help to fulfil the national environmental quality objectives. The project must also include measures taken within the scope of for example care and management of protected areas and species and dissemination of knowledge. The governmental aid is only available to the municipalities for extended and new projects within the area of local nature conservation projects. The County Administrative Board will be entrusted the management of the new governmental aid.

Implementing the EC Water Framework Directive

The objectives for groundwater set out in the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EG), and above all the programmes of measures which it requires, strengthen the status of groundwater, both as a source of drinking water and in ecological terms. In the Government Bill 2003/04:2, the government propose certain amendments of the Environmental Code necessary to implement the directive.

Under this proposal, Sweden is to be divided into water districts whose boundaries are decided by the water's natural flow. The water environmental work is to be co-ordinated within each of the water districts. Further, the Government should be able to issue provisions necessary to regulate the management of the water quality.

Many different environmental quality standards will be necessary in order to implement the directive. The most common one – provisions on limit values for pollution – will remain, but the Code must be altered to enable the Government to decide to adopt other environmental quality standards as well.

Under the current proposal, the Code's provisions on action programmes will be amended. Besides improved lucidity, the amendments mean that the public gives a greater chance of influence the contents of the programme. The changes also make it clear that it is the authorities and the municipalities that are responsible for the execution of the action programmes.

Ratification of the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (the PIC-convention)

The Government has decided that Sweden will ratify the PIC-convention. The purpose of the convention is to give information about hazardous chemicals that are forbidden or strictly restricted. In essence, the convention stipulates that a country, which receives certain hazardous chemicals, must be informed in advance by the exporting country. The informed country will then be in a position to refuse the import.