

NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR URBAN WASTE WATER TREATMENT IN POLAND

1. Programme description

The National Programme for Urban Waste Water Treatment was laid out by the Minister of the Environment and subsequently ratified by the Government of the Republic of Poland on 16 December 2003. The Programme was adopted in order to fulfil the obligations of the Government of the Republic of Poland as accepted in the Treaty on Poland's Accession into the European Union in its section concerning the directive 91/271/EEC. The National Programme outlines the investment plan with respect to water and waste water management to be realised by Poland in order to achieve the ecological effects required by virtue of the directive. The National Programme was prepared on the basis of reports submitted by local governments in the year 2003 pertaining to the state of providing the built-up areas and building lands with main collecting systems for urban waste water and waste water treatment plants, as well as plans for the coming years with respect to the above.

The National Programme provides for construction, extension and modernisation of urban water treatment plants and main collecting systems in 1378 agglomerations by the year 2015. As a result of its realisation, about 21,000 km of collecting mains and more than 1100 water treatment plants shall be built. The cost of this undertaking is estimated to amount to about 35 billion PLN (8,75 billion EURO) . This includes construction, extension or modernisation of main collection systems – about 24 billion PLN (6 billion EURO), and construction, extension or modernisation of urban waste water treatment plants – about 11 billion PLN (2,75 billion EURO). The Programme is realised with the use of the EU funds and with a contribution of the national ecological funds and municipalities' own means.

The National Programme for the Urban Water Waste Treatment in its activity covers the whole area of Poland. Therefore, full commitment of every public and local government's administrative level to cooperation on realisation of the adopted provisions is required. At the end of 2002 an Interdepartmental Team for National Programme of the Urban Water Waste Treatment was established. Its task is to facilitate solving problems, in particular related to ensuring proper conditions for the realisation of the Programme. The Interdepartmental Team comprised of, among others, representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Ministry of Interior and Administration, the Ministry of Finance, the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management.

The characteristic feature (*innovative elements*) of the National Programme is the ability of the parties concerned (*stakeholders*) to join in the programme (in this case the parties concerned include local authorities and their associations as well as private investors) in the course of realisation of the programme as well as the necessity of engaging all levels of administration. The programme provides for co-operation between the national and the private sector (*public-private partnership*). Other characteristic features include the way of financing of the projects, in which both internal and external funds are used, as well as the preferential investment conditions, whose aim is to encourage the realisation of the projects within shorter time spans.

The National Programme will contribute to the improved quality of urban waste water, and thus to the quality of surface water, as well as water and waste water related living conditions for the residents. The realisation of the programme will directly contribute to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals pertaining to the improvement of waste water collection conditions for communities.

2. Aspect of sustainable development and links with other national programmes (mainstreaming)

The national programme enjoys an ever growing interest of the authorities of towns and municipalities. It has been greatly successful in the shaping of the awareness of local self-governments and contributed to stimulation of local (municipality) level activities. 1311 municipalities participate in the programme, which amounts to 53 per cent of all municipalities in the country. The number of applications for co-financing of waste water treatment programmes rose by 82 per cent within a year of the implementation of the National Programme.

The Polish Government has decided to grant special privileges to investments which will have brought ecological effects by the end of the year 2005. The aim of the preferential terms of co-financing applied by the National Fund of Environmental Protection, which is in charge of, among others, co-financing of ecological investments, is to encourage investors to accelerate the realisation of the investments planned for the coming years and to achieve the greatest possible ecological effects by the year 2005.

It seems that the adopted solutions will allow for Poland's complete fulfilment of the accession obligations, both with respect to the required reduction of biogenic compounds content and to the time of effecting such reduction. It should also be stressed that full implementation of the Programme does not only mean meeting the European Union's standards of water purity. Its realisation also offers a great opportunity for the local community and for development of local economy, since the realisation of the Programme shall be connected with creation of new work places both in construction and maintenance of the new installations.

3. Application of the programme in other countries

The National Programme for Urban Waste Water Treatment is a country-wide programme which can be applied by those countries which have access to external financial support. Both domestic resources and significant foreign investment funds are necessary for the realisation of the Programme. The Programme can be replicated in countries which are candidates to European Union's membership as well as developing countries which receive foreign assistance funds.

Our experience to date with respect to the realisation of the National Programme for Waste Water Treatment shows that an important element of the programmes realisation is proper implementation of provisions of such an extensive, country-wide programme, as well as close co-operation and involvement of all levels of governmental administration. What is also crucial for the success of the programme's realisation is to communicate the information with respect to benefits for local governments resulting from participation in the Programme, which guarantees full commitment of self-governments.

Background information

The basic legal act regulating water management in Poland, in particular the shaping and protection of water resources, is the Law on Water act, into which the legal provisions of the European Union with respect to collection and treatment of waste water, in particular the directive 91/271/EEC concerning urban waste water treatment were transposed. The said directive obliges the Member States of the European Union to provide all agglomerations with a population equivalent of more than two thousand with collecting systems for urban waste water and to ensure biological treatment of waste water before their introduction to water so that waste water meets the requirements set forth in the directive.