

Draft Protocol on Pollutants and Multiple Effects

Over 30 member countries of the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution,* meeting in Geneva from 3 August–3 September, reached an agreement on a draft protocol designed to combat pollutants causing high rates of ground-level ozone, acid rain and the saturation of rivers, lakes and coastal areas (eutrophication).

The new protocol, due to be signed during the 29 November–3 December 1999 Ministerial meeting in Göteborg, Sweden, sets national emission ceilings for sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxide (NO_x), ammonia (NH₃) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) for 2010 and corresponding emission reduction targets by country for the 1990–2010 period.

The new draft protocol on *pollutants and multiple effects* tightens up the Protocols forming the body of the Convention: the 1985 (sulphur emissions), 1988 (nitrogen oxide) and 1991 (VOC) Protocols. It represents a major step forward, as for the first time it sets national emission ceilings for these pollutants, plus ammonia. It also acts as an addition to, and a major sign of support for, the European Commission's approach. (The latter tabled two draft Directives last June: the first setting national emission ceilings for the same quartet of air pollutants and the second setting limit values for the concentration of ozone in the ambient air).

The new draft protocol seeks to reduce in one step ozone in ambient air and eutrophication by lowering emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, volatile organic compounds and ammonia. The negotiations are

based on the “critical loads” approach, which in essence is setting basic reference values for the actual local impact of air pollutants rather than an equal reduction level for each country. The draft sets compulsory national emission ceilings for the year 2010, emission limits values for both mobile and fixed sources and standards for the sulphur content of fuels.

In the case of the EU, the future protocol proposes emission reduction targets in the period up to 2010 (compared with the level of emissions in 1990) in the order of 75 per cent for SO₂, 49 per cent for NO_x, 57 per cent for VOCs and 15 per cent for ammonia. In a new development, it proposes mandatory measures for reducing ammonia emissions from farming.

The negotiators have given the Parties to the Convention a time limit to come up with new, bolder national proposals. Document guides on best available technologies and economic instruments are to be annexed to the Protocol. □

Note

* The Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution was signed in 1979 and ratified by 43 of the 50 member countries of the UN/ECE. Four Protocols have phased in undertaking for the participating countries: the first ensures the long term funding of the concerted surveillance and evaluation programme (1984), the three others govern sulphur (1985), nitrogen oxide (1988) and volatile organic compound (1991) emissions. A second Protocol on new sulphur emission reductions was signed in 1994 (in force in 1998). Two additional Protocols were signed in 1998 during the pan-European Aarhus Conference: the Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and the Protocol on Heavy Metals (see also *Environmental Policy and Law*, vol. 28 at page 220).

0378-777X/99/\$12.00 © 1999 IOS Press