

THE UNECE CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (AARHUS CONVENTION)

TASK FORCE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION

ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TOOLS: CASE STUDY BY IRELAND

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Ireland’s Environment Web Resource



Link: [The Ireland’s Environment web resource \(http://www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/\)](http://www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/) is a distinct section of the EPA website and is accessible through the first tab on the top left-hand corner of the EPA homepage.

The web resource presents the key messages, information and data from the **EPA State of Environment Report (SoE)** using non – scientific language and is the live and interactive version of the SoE Report.

I. Description

▪ 1. Brief description:

Background

The **Environmental Protection Agency** is an independent Public Body established under the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992, as amended. Its sponsor in Government is the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

EPA Mission

The mission of the Agency is to protect and improve the environment as a valuable asset for the people of Ireland. To protect our people and the environment from harmful effects of radiation and pollution.

Strategic Priorities

The EPA has an important role to play as an environmental information and data provider and identified the following as key strategic priorities in recent years:

“Accessible information: provide timely and easily available environmental information to all our stakeholders”.

“Evidence based decision making: Continuously improve the timeliness and quality of our environmental data and inventories to support evidence-based decision making, integrated environmental assessment and reporting”.

“Working with Others: Engage and network with other sectors and organisations interacting with the environment”.

EPA Strategic Plan 2013 to 2015

“Better provision of online, up-to-date and accessible information on the environment to stakeholders”. EPA Strategic Plan 2016 to 2020.

With this in mind, the EPA carried out a review of the Ireland's Environment web resource (SoE Live) in 2014 and commenced a project for its redesign in order to make it more user friendly, visual and intuitive for users. The redesigned web resource involved the use of a variety of information tools such as infographics, factsheets, videos and a review of the national environmental indicators set. The redesigned "Ireland's Environment" was formally launched at the Environment Ireland Conference in September 2015.

Ireland's Environment – Environmental Themes – Landing page



Ireland's Environment provides:

- **easily accessible** and up-to-date **environmental information and data** “one-stop-shop” to the interested citizen, second and third level students, those involved in the preparation of policy and those responsible for management of key sectors of the economy.
- high level and up to date environmental information in a highly visual format under eight **environmental themes (air, water, waste, climate, land & soil, environment & wellbeing, sustainable economy and nature)**.
- **downloadable data on [environmental indicators](#)** using open data formats.
- links to more environmental information on how to [get informed](#) and [get involved](#) and to help users make informed environmental choices.
- information is communicated through the use of **videos, interactive graphs** (using the Highcharts charting tool), [factsheets, infographics](#), written environmental assessments and links to further information.
- a very important aspect of the resource is the “**call to action**” language and approach in the top navigation **inviting audiences to become informed** about and involved in the protection of Ireland's Environment.

My Local Environment Tab

The [“My Local Environment”](#) section of the web resource gives the user the facility to check out what is happening in their own Local Environment from an air quality, water quality, licensed facility perspective etc and to become more informed and aware of the environment around them.

From here the user can:

Insert their Eircode and address and search for environmental information available for their own locality within a 1 to 15km radius. This resource was also expanded to include the National Radon Map.

Get Informed Tab

The [“Get Informed”](#) section of the web resource gives the user the opportunity to get informed about the State of Ireland’s Environment and the data that underpins the assessment.

From here the user can:

- access detailed information on the key environmental indicators for Ireland. The data is available in interactive chart format and can also be downloaded in a variety of formats.
- check out [EPA Infographics](#) with lots of interesting facts and figures on air, water, waste, health and lots more.
- read about [EPA funded research](#) and how this research is increasing our understanding of environmental challenges.

and

- find out the [EPA’s education resources for primary and secondary school](#) students.

Get Involved Tab

The [“Get Involved”](#) section of the web resource provides users with information on ways they can become involved in protecting Ireland’s Environment.

From here the user can:

- check out the EPA's See-it Say-it App (for reporting pollution) for i-Phone or Android phones.
- learn more about EPA licensing and enforcement

and

- check out the [EPA citizen science](#) page for more ways to 'Get Involved'.



Ireland's Environment - The Story of Your Stuff Competition

- The EPA also launched a competition “The Story of Your Stuff” <http://www.thestoryofyourstuff.ie/> in 2017 to assist in bringing greater awareness to the Ireland’s Environment web resource and in doing so reaching out to second level school students in Ireland encouraging them to think about the everyday objects they interact with and to use their artistic talents to visually tell the story of that item (using a visual creative medium of their choice, video, animation, drawings, photography), considering the entirety of its life cycle. This includes what may become of it if it is correctly recycled and what can happen to it if it is not.
- The aim of the competition is that the students, and by extension their friends and family will become more aware of their environment and make everyday choices in their lives to have a positive impact on the planet.
- **Entrants were encouraged to use the EPA’s Ireland’s Environment web resource, www.IrelandsEnvironment.ie** when researching their project for accessible research and reports on topics such as climate change, biodiversity and waste management.
- In 2019, the competition resulted in increased traffic to the Ireland’s Environment web resource with total page views referred from The Story of Your Stuff website alone for the months January to February 2019 – 774 in comparison to 412 referred from the competition website for the year 2018.
- Sixty secondary schools from all over Ireland submitted entries to the competition in 2019.
- **The Story of Your Stuff competition** is one of the 2019 entries shortlisted for an **eGovernment award** in the category “Ireland eGovernment Environment and Social Impact Award”. The overall winner will be announced in September 2019.
- **2. Type:** [governmental, non-governmental, municipal, other]
Independent Public Body
- **3. Scope:** [international, sub-regional, national, local]
National
- **4. Working language(s):** d
English

▪ **5. Target users:** d

Target Audiences/Stakeholders

- Interested Citizens
- Influencers
- Policy Makers
- Local Authorities
- Schools and Colleges
- Environmental NGO's
- Economic Sector
- Media

▪ **6. Starting year:** d

The redesigned Ireland's Environment web resource was launched in September 2015.

▪ **7. Budget and funding source:**

Funding Source: Environmental Protection Agency

Budget €72,000

▪ **8. Contact:**

Brendan Wall
Environmental Protection Agency
Johnstown Castle Estate
Wexford
Ireland
Tel: +353 53 9160600

II. Implementation

▪ **9. Policy, legal and institutional context:**

The Environmental Protection Agency is required to prepare a report on the State of the Environment in Ireland every four years. The Ireland's Environment web resource is the live and interactive version of the SoE Report.

“The Agency shall prepare and publish the report required by section 70 of the Act of 1992 in 2008 and in every fourth year thereafter.” (S.I. No. 394/2004 - Environmental Protection Agency (Licensing) (Amendment) Regulations 2004).

▪ **10. Partner organizations:**

- Central Statistics Office
- Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment
- Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland
- Birdwatch Ireland
- National Biodiversity Data Centre

▪ **11. Stakeholders involved, their expected benefits:**

- The project team liaised with over 20 EPA data contributors in collating data and updating text and content on Ireland's Environment.
- The project team also liaised with external partners.
- The Ireland's Environment site is designed to be useful, educational and informational.
- The design appeals on a broad level across the board for a diverse audience base and age spectrum.
- Users enjoy the same intuitive journey at every level of the site.
- The simple, structured and uncluttered design facilitates easy navigation through consistency and the use of visual icons in assisting the user's understanding of the subjects and topics.
- The resource also aimed to empower the general-public to get more informed and involved on how and what they could do to help protect Ireland's Environment.
- It complements the more detailed environmental topic information, licensing and enforcement search tools and maps that are available elsewhere on the EPA website www.epa.ie
- The information that is available on Ireland's Environment is regularly updated.

▪ **12. User needs and methods of their assessment:**

The user experience is at the core of the site. Every aspect was considered with a professional web designer with the user always in mind in terms of:-

- Ease of use
- Intuitive steps
- Clarity and accessibility
- Uncluttered design
- Direct access to key information
- Interactive participation
- Interactive data (hi-charts)
- Visual attraction
- Simplicity

▪ **13. Technology choice:**

- The Ireland’s Environment web resource forms part of the main EPA website and therefore was built on the existing content management system (Terminal Four).

III. Evaluation

▪ **14. Results:**

Traffic to Ireland’s Environment since the re-design in 2015:

- The figures for unique page views to Ireland’s Environment Web Resource for the years 2015 to June 2019 shows a steady increase in user engagement with the resource.

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Ireland’s Environment web resource – Unique Page views by year | 28,832 | 66,108 | 77,965 | 98, 288 | 59,668 to June 2019 |

eGovernment Awards

- Ireland’s Environment won the 2016 eGovernment Award in the General category.



▪ **15. Efficiency gains:**

- The Ireland's Environment web resource has demonstrated itself to be a trusted gateway for everything the user needs to know about Ireland's Environment, bringing together a range of environmental topics.
- The redesign has assisted greatly in realising and delivering on our strategic objectives while also ensuring efficient use of information and data to meet the needs of target audiences and stakeholders.

▪ **16. Risks:**

- The main risk is the timely receipt of up-to-date environmental information and data from key data sources.
- Site availability issues which to-date have been minimal.

▪ **17. Challenges encountered (please indicate resolved or not):**

- The biggest task was to design a fully integrated and engaging website that would appeal to a diverse audience.
- Ensuring the information and data on the status of Ireland's Environment is kept up to date at all times can be challenging and involves ongoing collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders.
- As mentioned above the Ireland's Environment web resource is the "live" version of the SoE Report. As part of the SoE report process key personnel are nominated as Chapter Lead Authors and part of their role is to ensure that the content - key messages, information and data for their Chapter is kept up to date on Ireland's Environment at critical points in time.

▪ **18. Lessons learned:**

- The need for collaboration and close co-operation with the topic experts is key.
- Also, the resources that are needed to keep the web resource updated needs to be considered.

▪ **19. Conditions for successful replication:**

Ireland's Environment successful characteristics:

- The overall look is clean, uncluttered, inviting and self-explanatory, giving the user seamless access to each of the environmental themes covered.
- The landing page immediately and clearly visualised all of the themes covered through the use of clean, simple icons with titles utilising a natural colour palette, with three clear call to actions in the main navigation.
- Cleanliness of the overall structure and imagery usage was key to the success of the resource and intuitive expectations.
- The structure designed facilitated live media feed and social media updates in a consistent fixed column to the right of the page.
- The colour palette continues throughout the site, clearly distinguishing and clarifying each thematic area.

- The structure becomes very familiar to the user facilitating greater understanding and ease of use.
- Adheres to government and corporate guidelines with Level AA of the WCAG 2.0 from an accessibility perspective.

▪ **20. Overall assessment of the tool:**

- Ireland's Environment web presence has been a great benefit to us in addressing and informing the public (its audience) in an authoritative, educational, factual and friendly capacity.
- The project team achieved its aims of designing and building a fully integrated and engaging website to a diverse audience, providing up to date and timely information on the environment and inviting the user to become involved in the protection of Ireland's Environment.

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