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Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Working Group of the Parties

First meeting

Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2011

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Promotion and capacity-building

Technical assistance mechanism

Note by the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

1. Further to the decision of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers at its first session (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2, para. 43), the Bureau of the Protocol developed a questionnaire with the support of the secretariat that was distributed among Parties and Signatories to the Protocol and other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe member States on 10 March 2011.
2. The questionnaire was intended to gather information on the need for a technical assistance mechanism to support implementation of the Protocol. The questionnaire aimed to (a) collect information on countries' current activities on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) (Part I); (b) to identify barriers to the implementation of PRTRs (Part II); and (c) to suggest solutions to the barriers identified (Part III).
3. The secretariat received a total of 25 responses¹ to the questionnaire, 17 from Parties to the Protocol,² 6 from Signatories³ and 2 from other ECE member States.⁴

¹ Responses to the questionnaire will be made available on the following ECE web page:
<http://live.unece.org/env/pp/prtr.cb.html>.

² The following Parties sent their responses to the questionnaire: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Germany, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia,

I. Capacity-building activities

4. The survey revealed that the main capacity-building activities reported by countries are as follows: (a) design of the main PRTR characteristics; (b) preparation of the PRTR guidance documents; (c) national workshops PRTR workshops; (d) design and development of a PRTR that is accessible online; (e) preliminary or related activities; (f) setting up an information technology reporting tool for PRTR data flow; (g) and national PRTR implementation. Most of the countries have implemented these activities or implementation is ongoing. In general, countries that have not implemented these activities have made plans to do so.

5. A lesser number of countries have implemented the following capacity-building activities: (a) a feasibility study to assess existing capacity for a PRTR; (b) regional and/or international PRTR activities; (c) development of a national proposal; and (d) a pilot trial.

6. Some countries have implemented other capacity-building activities, in addition to the activities mentioned above. The Czech Republic reports ongoing improvement of the national PRTR website, with some updating of a reporting tool for operators, as well as a session on diffuse sources on the website; Georgia has implemented PRTR awareness-raising activities; Sweden has implemented usability surveys; Switzerland has organized regular meetings of a PRTR working group and training courses for industry and other stakeholders; and Armenia is planning local seminars in the region and a pilot trial for operators.

7. The results of the survey provide a basis for better promotion of PRTRs and engaging more countries in making the available information more accessible.

II. Barriers for capacity-building activities

8. The survey reveals that the main barrier to capacity-building activities is limited financial resources. Other notable obstacles reported include: (a) poor cooperation with other agencies in collecting environmental data; (b) limited communication and cooperation with industrial facilities; (c) the high cost of equipment; (d) difficulty in drafting legislation; (e) limited expertise/know-how; and (f) limited interest in using a PRTR. In all the cases, these barriers have been ranked between a medium and high level of importance. Some countries have reported other barriers with a high ranking of importance, for example, Bulgaria specified it lacked a methodology for estimating annual emissions to water and from diffuse sources; a lack of consistency in emissions values obtained using measurement and estimation methods; a lack of instruments to identify the PRTR facilities; and a lack of guidance on how to assess confidentiality claims. For the Netherlands there are difficulties regarding the high cost of maintaining the system and in the integration of the system with other reporting systems.

9. The results of the survey provide a basis for further developments, such as the organization of workshops with industrial facilities, authorities and agencies responsible for the data quality, aiming at increasing their awareness on the importance of the PRTR data-collection and validation processes, as well as trying to obtain more financial resources to achieve this objective.

Spain, Sweden (sent two responses), Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

³ The Signatories that sent a response were Armenia, Cyprus, Georgia, Ireland, Poland and Serbia.

⁴ Azerbaijan and Belarus also sent their responses to the questionnaire.

III. Solutions for overcoming obstacles

10. The responses received suggested the following main types of solutions and actions to overcome the existing obstacles: (a) further promotion and encouragement of bilateral cooperation between countries that are advanced in implementing PRTRs and those that require assistance; (b) provision of more information on technical assistance opportunities from existing programmes; (c) assistance in organizing technical trainings for operators on compiling PRTRs; (d) facilitation of access to free software available for managing PRTR data flow; and (e) establishment of a capacity-building fund to support capacity-building activities.
