

REVIEWED RIVER GUIDELINES: MAJOR CHANGES AFTER 4 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WITH PILOT PROJECTS UNDER THE UN/ECE WATER CONVENTION

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Under the UN/ECE Water Convention the "Guidelines on water-quality monitoring and assessment of transboundary rivers" were adopted in 1996. After a period of four years, substantial additions to the guidelines were necessary. Reasons include important international strategic and scientific developments during the past few years. There was also considerable experience gained on best practices to implement monitoring and assessment activities under the Convention. Besides, particular attention was given to the further development of recommendations for monitoring and assessment of water-quantity and water and health aspects.

The findings of pilot projects on monitoring and assessment of transboundary rivers were included in this revision. In 1997, the task force on monitoring and assessment under the Convention started the implementation of the 1996 Guidelines in a pilot project programme which covers eight river basins in the UN/ECE region. Although the completion of this programme will take two more years, the findings of the various projects have already led to substantial modifications of, and additions to, the guidelines.

More attention has been given to the analysis of water management issues in river basins, as the outcome of this analysis defines the scope of environmental information which is relevant for the respective transboundary river and its catchment area. In transboundary river basins, there is generally an urgent need for good practices to identify problems and to find the cause-and-effect relations concerning pressures and transboundary impact. The role of inventories and preliminary surveys has been further elaborated, as these activities may form excellent tools in problem analysis.

Special attention has been given to the evaluation of legislation. In the UN/ECE region, different assessment methods and classification systems are used by riparian countries. Harmonisation of water-quality criteria and targets will lead to a better evaluation of the scientific basis of the different classification systems. Comparison with internationally accepted risk assessment criteria is required. There is also a need to compare the existing national legislative systems with recent developments in EU legislation, for example, the draft Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

The role of indicators in environmental information has been emphasised. Environmental information should not only focus on the state of the transboundary river, but also on the pressures and the driving forces which constitute the actual and future state of the river and/or its catchment area. In addition, information on the impact of the state and the response of the society form indispensable elements and are politically relevant for decision making. These considerations were brought in line with recent developments by leading international institutions, such as the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Recommendations on approximate calculations (estimates) of loads from point sources and diffuse sources have also been incorporated as such estimates are of utmost importance for the receiving waters (lakes, estuaries, seas) as well as for pollution abatement strategies in river basins. Finally, the institutional aspects have been further elaborated, and the links to the relevant provisions of the Convention were more developed.