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Monitoring industrial pollution comparative study in the Meuse river basin

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The future framework directive requires integrated water resource management at the level of river basins. It will lead to the standardisation of practices, especially as regards transboundary rivers. In order to be prepared, the International Office for Water proposed and led a comparative study of the methods used for monitoring industrial pollution in the Meuse River basin. This basin concerns 4 countries : France, Germany, Belgium (Walloon region and Flanders) and the Netherlands.

The study was undertaken within the framework of the DGX's LIFE programme, with the assistance of the Rhine-Meuse Water Agency, RIZA (the Netherlands), the North Rhine Westfallen Lander, VMM (Flanders) and the Ministry of the Walloon Region.

This study included a precise inventory of the practices used in each country. It proposed significant changes in administrative and technical practices in order to constitute homogenous inventories of discharges on the scale of the river basin. Its conclusions were submitted and discussed during a seminar held in Liege in June 1998.

The final report summary is available in French, English, German and Dutch and can be obtained from IOWater. Here is a brief overview :

Inventories of discharges

These inventories are databases of the quantities of discharged polluting substances. They usually are at region or country level, rarely on the scale of the river basin. Data come from various sources : discharge permits, estimates of polluting loads, measurements.

Their use for the follow-up of pollution control policies is not systematic and should be developed.

The Authorities's role

They monitor polluting discharges but they tend, more and more, to impose self-monitoring practices to the industrialists, under the supervision of independent laboratories.

The study recommends that self-monitoring be developed jointly with the industrialists and encourages the Authorities to establish procedures and standards to be complied with as well as control measures.

Measured parameters

Although it was noted that many similarities do exist as concerns the usual parameters monitored by the regional or national authorities, differences subsist regarding micropolluting substances.

The study recommends that lists of parameters be jointly established as well as of the thresholds that require measurements.

Sampling methods

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It was noted that the approaches were very different in terms of frequency. The study recommends that sampling programmes be set up according to the statistical accuracy required by yearly reports.

Analytical methods

There are no common standards used in the river basin. The adoption of international standards is recommended but this does not prevent the use of alternative methods as long as they are comparable.

Toxicity tests

Their use is increasing but is not systematic yet and the conditions under which the tests are implemented are different. It is advisable that their use be given priority for direct polluting discharges every time there are many substances.