

# COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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ACID DEPOSITIONS

(COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL)

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1. The increasing extent and transboundary nature of certain aspects of atmospheric pollution generally known as acid rain or acid depositions call for certain careful attention and special measures on the part of the Community.
  2. The main points involved are :
    - the damage done to forests and soils;
    - the acidification of surface water, especially lakes, and the consequent effects on aquatic life;
    - the corrosion of structures, particularly historical monuments.
  3. Although scientists are still unable to provide a full explanation of the causes and mechanisms, it seems to be generally accepted that the substances mainly involved are sulphur and nitrogen oxides and photochemical oxidants. These pollutants come from industrial plant and motor vehicles.
  4. The Community and its Member States have already taken a number of steps to combat air pollution. Community measures include :
    - setting up an observation network;
    - organising a research programme;
    - fixing air quality standards, particularly for sulphur dioxide and lead in the air;
    - setting emission standards for motor vehicle exhaust gases.

The Community and its Member States are also signatories of the Geneva Convention on long-range transboundary air pollution.

5. Apart from implementing the Community Directives, the Member States have acted on their own initiative to limit emissions of air pollutants. Their measures involve authorisation and reporting systems for certain types of industrial plants.
6. The Commission feels that these initiatives should be supplemented and strengthened because :
  - the strictness with which Community measures on standards are implemented varies from one Member State to the next; some States permit great flexibility with regard to emission levels;
  - Community standards cover only some of the pollutants involved;
  - the standards were laid down essentially from the public health point of view without fully taking into account the environmental considerations, which sometimes call for stricter measures.
7. There is therefore great disparity between national measures with the result that the burden on the production costs varies from country to country and may lead to distortion in some instances.
8. For these reasons and in view of the increasing scale of the acid deposition phenomena recorded, the Commission proposes :
  - to supplement existing Directives with ones on industrial installations which create the most pollution, such as large furnaces, and on permissible levels for nitrogen oxides in the atmosphere. The proposed measures should be applied progressively in view of their economic effects and the state of existing technologies.

- to set up, under the Common Agricultural Policy, a data-recording network for monitoring the effects of acid rain on forests throughout the Community;
  - to hold an international scientific symposium in September at Karlsruhe to assess the present state of knowledge regarding acid depositions;
  - in the light of the results of that symposium, to expand Community research in this field.
9. In addition, as regards the reduction of pollution from motor vehicle exhaust gases, the Commission has decided, in view of the close links between the lead content of petrol and the possibility of reducing the other pollutants in exhaust gases :
- to direct its work (in the context of its global approach and with due regard to the regulations passed in non-member countries) on the adaptation of Community rules relative to the automobile sector in a perspective of the complete removal of lead from petrol, taking into account the consequences of such removal on refining costs, energy expenditure and the automobile manufacturing industry, and holding consultations, which will be essential, with the parties concerned;
  - to invite Member States initially to bring the lead level in their petrol closer to the 0.15 grammes/litre laid down as the lower limit in current Community legislation.
10. Having received Parliament's opinion, the Council should immediately adopt a draft Directive designed to reduce pollution from exhaust gases in line with ECE regulations.
11. In conclusion, the Commission invites the European Council to take note of the above initiatives and to support them.