



Clearing the Air

Involving the Citizens of Bourgas in a Pollution Solution



The sun doesn't have to set on local industry when the public is involved and informed.

BACKGROUND

The city of Bourgas is one of Bulgaria's environmental "hot spots" due to a wide range of industrial activity. Residents are becoming increasingly sensitive to pollution problems, with complaints brought regularly to city authorities. However, authorities and representatives of the various segments of society lack the knowledge and skills to ensure that governance and decision making follow the principles of public participation.

OBJECTIVES

The project team aimed to:

- improve awareness levels among representatives of all sectors of Bourgas' society (local authorities, businesses, NGOs, students and the general public) of the Aarhus Convention, particularly public participation in decision making;



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- create an effective and accessible information base (including practical guidelines and training kits) to assist local authorities in effective application of provisions of the Aarhus Convention; and
- demonstrate the efficiency of the public participatory strategy in the elaboration of the air quality management programme.

METHODOLOGY

The team accomplished its aims by:

- establishing an advisory committee to work with experts;
- conducting a sociological inquiry and an analysis of air pollution in Bourgas and the health problems related to it;
- establishing permanent communication, consultation and registration systems to ensure continuous involvement of the public, including “open hours for consultation,” a “green telephone,” an “environmental box” at City Hall and regional offices and a weekly environmental bulletin;
- publishing articles and analyses in regional newspapers on a regular basis;
- publishing and disseminating brochures, leaflets and stickers; and
- organising a series of public hearings on the city’s air quality management programme in every district of Bourgas.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The project managed to:

- elaborate an air quality management programme with the involvement of representatives of interested parties and citizens of Bourgas;
- initiate a continuous dialogue and create a sustainable mechanism for interaction between local authorities and the public to solve local environmental problems;
- get the Bourgas city government to improve its administrative infrastructure and activities, which led to an increased level of transparency and openness;
- demonstrate to citizens that their opinion is important and can influence the decision-making process; and
- inform the local population about provisions of the Aarhus Convention.

FOLLOW-UP

This pilot project has the potential to serve as a good example of how public participation can work in other localities in Bulgaria. The national workshop organised at the end of the project was considered a first step toward sharing the lessons of the project with other cities. The advisory committee established for the project will continue to oversee the air quality management programme and make sure that it has the support of stakeholders.

