
SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP: ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS: INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT, AND ACCESS

Facilitators: Robert Chouinard
Piet Müskensl
Rapporteur: Michael Stahl

GOALS

- Consider different information systems currently in use, their role in environmental management, their strengths and weaknesses.
- Discuss implications of expanded public access to compliance and enforcement information.
- Identify roles INECE can play in sharing information about compliance and enforcement data systems.

1 INTRODUCTION

Questions presented by facilitators:

- Do you use or plan to use information management systems?
- What role can INECE play in information sharing about such systems?
- To what degree should public access be featured in such systems?

2 PAPERS

Greert Van Grootveld and Pieter Van Der Most, *Information to Facilitate Environment Compliance and Enforcement* (6th Conference Proceedings, Volume 1).

3 DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The workshop participants began by describing systems currently in use and the strengths and weakness of those systems. All participants agreed on the need for systems that were designed to achieve specific purposes (e.g., data for inspectors, information for policy makers, etc.); utilize data that is accurate and timely; and rely on appropriate and affordable technology.

At the same time, participants offered a litany of weaknesses in the systems they are using. Many cited resource issues as a significant impediment. These issues included lack of adequate funding to maintain or upgrade systems, and lack of trained staff to enter data in a timely and accurate manner. Another category of weaknesses focused on the fragmentation of systems, each serving a specific purpose but unable to link to other systems to produce more sophisticated data and enable more thoughtful analysis. This inability to integrate data is a serious obstacle to using data for managing enforcement and compliance programs. The participants felt that the best way to address and overcome this obstacle was not to design single comprehensive systems but to build links between current systems that would allow information to be organized in more useful ways.

In considering the role INECE could play in information sharing about such systems, participants made two specific suggestions. The first suggestion was for INECE to collect and disseminate best practices regarding enforcement and compliance information systems. In this best practices role, INECE was urged to tailor

information to meet both the needs of developing nations that are in the early stages of system design, and the needs of developed nations that may be attempting to upgrade, modernize, or integrate existing information systems. These best practices could be gathered from the actual experience of various nations and made available or actively distributed through the INECE web site or other specialized delivery mechanisms.

A second suggestion about the INECE role was to provide an enhanced "help desk" function to provide quick responses to requests for particular types of enforcement and compliance information. Agencies could use this function to post inquiries for which they were seeking advice from other nations. These inquiries could include technical advice about aspects of specific enforcement matters, issues about maintenance and management of information systems, or advice about improvements or enhancements to those systems.

The workshops also discussed the degree to which public access should be featured in enforcement and compliance information systems. There was general recognition that some types of enforcement and compliance information should not be made public. Specifically, information pertaining to ongoing investigations and enforcement cases should not be shared

with the public. But there was also recognition of the many benefits possible through public access to other types of enforcement and compliance information. For example, public access to the compliance histories of facilities, companies, or industries could motivate those entities to improve their environmental management and their efforts to maintain compliance. Also, public access to data about agency activities and results can enhance accountability and build understanding and support among the public.

4 CONCLUSION

The workshop participants felt that there was a role for INECE to play in expanding public access to enforcement and compliance information. Participants recognized that INECE could not be prescriptive in designing specific aspects of public access efforts in individual nations. Instead, each nation would need to make its own choices about the nature and amount of information it could make available to the public. However, INECE could make a valuable contribution by endorsing the concept of public access to compliance and enforcement information, delineating the benefits of public access and making nations aware of those benefits, and organizing expertise that could be offered to assist nations with efforts to expand public access.