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Three sites excluded from the Barents environmental “hot spots” list

Three environmental pollution sources were excluded from the Barents environmental “hot spots” list today at the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) meeting of the ministers of the environment, held in Inari, Finland. The Arkhangelsk Heat and Power Plant (Arkhangelsk District) and Kondopoga Pulp and Paper Mill (Republic of Karelia) have decreased their air emissions remarkably. A system to handle mercury-containing wastes was established in Nenets Autonomous District.

In 2003 the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) together with the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) defined a list of hot spots. Hot spots are polluted environmental sites that pose a health risk to those who live near them or regionally, either because of direct impacts or the potential to pollute the atmosphere, drinking water or other parts of the food chain.

The 2003 hot spots report pointed out that the lack of a system for handling mercury-containing waste was a serious problem in Nenets Autonomous District. Nenets now has a collection and treatment system for wasted luminescent lamps.

The Arkhangelsk Heat and Power Plant has invested nearly RUB 470 million in converting the fuel source from oil to natural gas. As a result, especially the emissions of acidifying sulphur dioxide and oil ash have decreased remarkably and the plant complies with the maximum allowed pollution levels defined by the Russian authorities. Earlier, almost 45% of the air pollutants of the city of Arkhangelsk originated from the heat and power plant.

A shift from fuel oil and coal to natural gas at the Kondopoga pulp and paper combined mill in the Republic of Karelia has resulted in significant reductions of sulphur dioxide and coal ash emissions. Investments worth over RUB 4000 million have brought the plant into compliance with the maximum allowed pollution levels defined by the Russian authorities.

All the improvements at these three hot spots have been made under financing by the companies themselves or with local budgets.

In 2003, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council foreign and environment ministers set a target of launching environmental measures at all of the hot spots within 10 years by 2013. The BEAC Working Group on Environment published an assessment report describing the current state of hot spots today at the meeting.

According to the report, certain measures aimed at solving environmental problems have been launched at 42 out of 42 hot spots, though not all environmental problems are solved yet. As of 2003 a total of 6 hot spots have now been excluded. The report confirms that measures aimed at solving environmental problems have been launched at 42 out of 42 hot spots. The measures were and are different by character — from elaboration of management plans to modernisation of industry or elimination of waste. The stage of implementation varies — from launched to completed improvements. Additionally, the investments made and needed differ in size of target area and environmental effect.

During the last years, significant environmental improvements have been achieved at several hot spots. Completed and ongoing activities include environmental modernisation in the pulp and paper sector and in municipal wastewater treatment in some major towns. There are also towns where the heating systems

have been converted from fuel oil or coal to natural gas. The first steps in addressing waste management in a comprehensive manner have been taken in many regions and, in many places, people's exposure to hazardous substances such as mercury, obsolete pesticides and dioxins has been reduced.

"However, a lot of work still remains to be done and investments will be needed at many hot spots before the environmental problems are solved. Special attention and further international cooperation are needed to reduce transboundary impacts to a level that does not harm health and the environment", says Ville Niinistö, Finland's minister of the Environment.

Akvaplan-niva AS, Norway, and the System Development Agency, Russia, prepared the assessment report with financing by NEFCO.

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