
WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE

VERKERK, PIETER

Inspector General, Inspectorate for the Environment, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, The Netherlands

First of all I will refresh your memory a little bit. The first international meeting on the enforcement of environmental legislation was held in Utrecht already 8 years ago. Since then we have come a long way fast. After Budapest, Oaxaca, and Chiang Mai, we now find ourselves in Monterey, but once again in the company of a huge number of participants from a vast range of countries and international organizations. Some already participated but 69% are newcomers today.

I consider it a very great pleasure to be here with my colleague Steve Herman, the Assistant Administrator for Enforcement at the US EPA to raise the curtain on this fifth conference. I am convinced that this will be another successful conference but leave things to your involvement and the involvement of the organizations which have given you the opportunity to be here today.

What are we seeking to achieve at this conference? Environmental problems are international, they do not recognize any borders. This simple message means that enforcement of environmental legislation should be an international and therefore a trans-cultural issue. In previous conferences we have focused to a significant extent on putting forward the knowledge and experience from all organizations for the benefit of all participants. The aim of this conference is no different. At Chiang Mai we observed that we have reached a point where we could proceed towards further development of international enforcement networks at the global and regional levels and the Executive Planning Committee has elaborated on these designs since Chiang Mai.

Internationally, the actual implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation still lacks strength. However, there are clear declarations of intent in this field. And I'm thinking of the G-8 Environment Ministers Summit in Miami in 1997, the enforcement consultation meeting of representatives of the G-8 countries in Washington in 1998 and the G-8 Summit in Birmingham in 1998 as well. Greater attention needs to be devoted to compliance and enforcement in political and administrative circles.

Enforcement of environmental legislation must come to feature more explicitly on the international political policy agenda so as to create the necessary conditions for establishing an adequate inspection structure in each country. There can be no disputing the fact that international conventions and protocols on climate, ozone, hazardous waste substances, or toxic chemical substances – on which agreement was reached in Kyoto, Montreal, Basel and Rotterdam – all contribute to a better environment if they are enforced.

The Netherlands has a vested interest in the effective implementation and enforcement of environmental regulations because the environmental pollution recognizes no borders. Implementation and enforcement counters distortion of competition and answers demands from the business community. The indicative model from The Netherlands' National Institute of Public Health and Environment (the RIVM) also reveals that incomplete compliance with environmental legislation can lead to shortfalls of more than 20-30% in estimated emissions reductions in The Netherlands. In other countries this figure may be different and even higher. All the more reason for concentrating our full attention on enforcing environmental legislation. Sometimes I get the feeling that environmental inspectors are

viewed or judged by politicians and the policy sector in general, to be a group of hardliners only dealing with law and order. Too much is neglected in observing that enforcers play a dominant role in implementing environmental policy and getting environmental results. Perhaps we must present ourselves more in this direction by promoting and improving and perhaps selling our results more effectively to the policy makers. Fortunately many countries support the idea of working towards regional enforcement networks from the basis of the international INECE enforcement network. The first new regional meetings have now been held, ECA INECE in Vilnius, Lithuania and ASPA INECE in Bangkok, Thailand, adding to networks already in existence in North and Central America and Western Europe. They proved very successful. The written reports of these meetings are available and you will hear more about them in the course of this conference.

What then is our vision of the future? We will be moving away from international conferences and enforcement of environmental legislation as we currently know them. We will move towards regional enforcement networks where countries within a given region determine the actual content of enforcement of environmental legislation. The existing channels provided by international organizations will be used to the greatest possible extent. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has already been involved in the ASPA INECE Thailand and could also be one of the players to benefit other regional networks. This vision can be further explored as we work to develop these aspects in the course of this conference. The members of the Executive Planning Committee are all prepared to assist.

These regional enforcement networks for environmental legislation require backing in the form of a secretariat capable of providing assistance and support to participants. The Netherlands is currently considering a request for support of such a secretariat for ECA INECE in Lithuania. We are convinced that a financial solution in this matter will be forthcoming. Similar solutions must also be found for other secretariats. This is my sincere hope that other countries and organizations will wish to participate in setting up these INECE secretariats and will not only lend their financial support but also their participation to such projects.

Apart from these INECE secretariats we are moving towards an Executive Planning Committee which will stimulate these secretariats, maintain contacts and provide support where requested but which will also promote development and progress within the networks. We can then discuss progress with the Executive Planning Committee and key representatives from the countries participating in these regional enforcement networks at international enforcement conferences held every two years and on a smaller scale than the current ones.

Over and above this we can still rely on support from our staff for the Executive Planning Committee as well as our Internet homepage and the INECE newsletters as well, as ongoing workgroups on selected topics. As you have heard this is a future vision dealing with the further international development of enforcement of environmental legislation. Our vision is a very positive one but it stands or falls by participation in its most active form. I am convinced that together we can further shape our vision of the INECE future during the next few days. We will speak again at the end of the conference, and I have the fullest confidence that by then we'll have made significant progress in the international enforcement of environmental legislation. The Dutch government has in any event pledged its commitment to the success of this conference and of those to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a very fruitful conference and a very successful conference as well. Thank you for your kind attention.