



NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

PUBLIC AUDIT REPORT

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL FOR PROTECTION OF AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT FROM CONTAMINATION WITH HAZARDOUS CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES

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Full audit report in Lithuanian is available on the website of the National Audit Office: www.vkontrole.lt

SUMMARY

The goal of environmental protection of the Republic of Lithuania, namely, to ensure adequate quality of the environment for the country's population and to provide for conditions for sustainable territorial development, has been laid down in national strategic documents. This goal cannot be achieved unless good status of surface water bodies (rivers, lakes, ponds, Curonian Lagoon, coastal waters), one of the most important elements of the environment, is safeguarded.

The main source of chemical pollution of surface water is industrial waste water, which gets into the aquatic environment together with chemical pollution, and the chemical pollution does not decontaminate itself. Some chemical substances have carcinogenic, mutagenic or cumulative effects, which may be caused even by very small concentrations. In addition, problems may arise due to the fact that country's municipal waste water treatment facilities were designed for treating domestic sewage but not industrial waste water polluted with hazardous chemicals. Therefore, there is a risk that in case these substances are not properly taken care of they can accumulate in nature and at some point cause acute and chronic toxic impact on aquatic organisms, destruct biodiversity, and damage human

health. The audit evaluated the efficiency of the environmental protection system and assessed if the system ensured that hazardous chemical substances do not get into the aquatic environment together with industrial waste water.

In 2010 there were more than 9000 chemical preparations and almost 900 chemical substances registered in the Lithuanian Database of Chemical Substances. Around 80 per cent (over 700) of these substances pose hazard to the aquatic environment, and this number has been continuously increasing. Protection of the aquatic environment from such amounts of substances is difficult and expensive, therefore measures are required to prevent these substances from entering the aquatic environment. Separate elements, which can constitute a prevention system, are already in place in Lithuania, however, the system has not been completed yet.

One of the key elements of such potential prevention system is the Programme for the Reduction of Water Pollution with Hazardous Substances approved in 2004. The audit identified that there are a number of weaknesses in the Programme, which lead to insufficiently effective implementation of the Programme measures. Chemical substances which pose the greatest threat to the aquatic environment are called priority hazardous substances; however, the said Programme does not provide for measures and specific deadlines for stopping pollution with such substances. Furthermore, no assessment criteria have been established for the implementation of the Programme objectives, and the implementation of its key measures substantially affecting results of other measures is well overdue. As a result, municipal waste water treatment facilities and regional environmental protection departments, which are supposed to control how economic entities that have chemicals at their disposition store or discharge these substances into the sewerage, lack basic information about them to be able to do their job in a proper manner.

The implementation of the measures under the Programme for the Reduction of Water Pollution with Hazardous Substances falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment and its subordinate institutions; however, the Ministry has not been exploiting all the potential for ensuring the protection of the aquatic environment from contamination with hazardous chemical substances.

The audit report provided recommendations which aim to develop more favourable conditions for effective protection of the aquatic environment, namely, to amend the Programme for the Reduction of

Water Pollution with Hazardous Substances and some legislation regulating this area.

The Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania has drawn up a Plan of Measures for the Implementation of Public Audit Recommendations.