

## Impasse reached on European carbon tax

Time has run out for Europe's carbon-energy tax. At the mid-December meeting of the European Union Environment Council, environment ministers agreed to let member states make their own provisions for meeting the target of reducing Europe's carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. The action effectively kills the proposal for a standard Europe-wide carbon tax.

Advocates of the tax had argued that it was the only way to fulfill Europe's Earth Summit promise to stabilize carbon dioxide emission levels. With the UN Convention on Climate Change meeting coming up in March, Europe needs to find some answers—and fast.

At the October meeting of the Environment Council, the United Kingdom, in lone dissent, again thwarted any agreement. The UK maintains that such economic

### 1990 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

Country	Emissions/Mt
Germany	993.0
United Kingdom	578.8
Italy	401.6
France	367.4
Spain	209.4
Netherlands	156.7
Belgium	110.7
Greece	73.3
Remaining EU	134.8

Source: European Commission, Eurostat office.

measures should be a national responsibility. Under the proposal put forward by the council president, German Environment Minister Klaus Töpfer, a tax based on existing excise duties would be applied gradually to consumers,

transport, and industry. The system would be staggered in the poorer states, and taxation levels would be eventually stepped up. The tax is designed to reduce carbon-based energy consumption. According to Töpfer the ministers were "very, very close to a solution" on the carbon tax, which the council has been grappling with for more than two years. That proposal was revisited in the council's December meeting in Brussels. It was Töpfer's last meeting as chair (the position passes to the French minister in January), and he was determined to break the deadlock.

Commission officials have stated that although the energy tax will be voluntary, most member states will apply it. The challenge of pulling together a common plan to reduce emissions now falls to the finance ministers. —MARIA BURKE

## EPA regional offices plan multimedia reorganization

Two EPA regional offices have embarked on a plan that could be the harbinger of how environmental laws are enforced, permits are issued, and research is done in the future. EPA Region I (New England) and Region VIII (Rocky Mountains) are reorganizing their offices and moving from a media-specific structure to one based on a multimedia, pollution prevention approach.

Once final, the shift could put teeth into EPA's oft-stated philosophical emphasis on ecosystems and cross-media permitting and enforcement. Detailed reorganization plans are to be completed and submitted to EPA headquarters by March 1995.

Although an internal examination, which led to the reorganization, was called for by the Clinton administration's charge to reinvent and streamline government, "Region I knew it was time for a change," says Patricia Meaney, acting deputy administrator for the region.

"It was clear that media-based programs of the past 23 years are no longer as successful in protecting the environment as they had been," she says. "Past problems were more egregious and easier to see. Now, they are much more complex. We need to examine environmental problems in a multimedia way."

The Region I plan would create several new offices. The Environmental Stewardship Office will be charged with enforcement, pollution prevention, and regulatory compliance and will emphasize a facility's impact on an entire ecosystem rather than on each medium. The office will also encourage the use of new environmental technologies. The Ecosystem Management Office will oversee permitting, planning, and resource management by a specific "place," such as an ecosystem or water body. The Environmental Measurement and Evaluation Office will take charge of labs, field sampling, and re-

search work. The Restoration and Revitalization Office will lead cleanups.

Region VIII has a similar proposal, which sets up assistant regional administrators and offices for pollution prevention and state and tribal programs; environmental justice, enforcement and compliance; ecosystem management and remediation; and technical services and management.

Although the concept has been approved by EPA Administrator Carol Browner, many of the details are yet to come, Meaney notes. For instance, it is unclear how the new regional structures will fit with media-specific state organizations, which do most of the on-the-ground environmental enforcement. However, Meaney notes that states are very interested in the regional changes.

Meaney predicts that other EPA Regional Offices will adopt multimedia structures as their reorganization plans move closer to completion. —JEFF JOHNSON