



New guide to the Aarhus Convention

The United Nations Economic Cooperation for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) have issued a new guide to the Aarhus convention.

The convention gives the citizens the right to access to environmental information, participation in environmental decision making and access to justice. The European Community, almost all EU Member States and a number of other countries are parties to the convention.

The new guide is available in English, French and Russian. It aims to raise public awareness about the convention and to inform people in a simple and easily understandable way about their rights according to the convention.

Officials working with environmental information are urged to disseminate the guide directly or use it for inspiration to develop similar guides in their own language. They may also find the guide useful in their own work because it provides updated information about their own and all other public officials' obligations under the convention. It answers questions in relation to public access to environmental information such as:

- What information must officials provide upon request?
- What information can one deny to release?
- What if the authority does not have the information requested?
- What information must authorities provide in an emergency?

The guide also describes when and how people must be included in environmental decision making as part of the development of specific projects, programmes and plans related to the environment .

Finally the guide contains an introduction to the requirements on access to justice. For access to information and public participation to be effective, the public must have access to a court of law or administrative proceeding - called access to justice. Such a review mechanism provides a means of challenging decisions taken by authorities.

For more information, download the guide from UNEP's homepage:
http://www.unep.org/dec/information/public_information.html#pp

This newsflash is issued by the EECN which is DG Environment's support structure for European Environmental Communication Networks.

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http://ec.europa.eu/environment/networks/index_en.htm to learn more about the activities of the networks and read newsflashes previously released.

