



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
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Commission on Sustainable Development, the 16th session  
On the occasion of the debate about the thematic cluster for the  
implementation cycle 2008/2009 regarding  
"Review of CSD 13 decisions on Water and Sanitation"

Statement by Ms. Ulla Kaarikivi-Laine  
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United Nations Headquarters  
New York, 12 May 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The Secretary-General's report describes very clearly that the current trends don't support achievement of the global sanitation targets. It also shows dissimilar trends in different parts of the world. Many places lack basic sanitation services and infrastructure, and, in some other areas, the rehabilitation of these structures is cause for concern.

Finland fully supports the statement made by Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

Water protection in rural areas is a major challenge all over the world. At the beginning of the 2000s, Finland faced the problem that urban wastewater treatment was advanced, but a fifth of the population living in rural areas outside centralized sewerage systems were still polluting watercourses considerably. Subsequently, new legislation was passed in 2003 setting minimum standards for the treatment of wastewater from households outside sewerage networks. All new wastewater treatment systems had to meet the new standards from the beginning of 2004. Wastewater treatment systems already in operation before 2004 have until 2014 to meet the new requirements. The new legislation will lead to an overall reduction of 6–8% in total anthropogenic phosphorus discharges in Finland.

I would like to share with you a few of the lessons we learned.

First, innovative technologies that fit the local conditions are important. Another key issue is developing well-functioning equipment that is reliable and easy to maintain. In some cases, less expensive systems such as septic tanks with a soil adsorption system can be used. In many cases, however, more expensive prefabricated systems are needed. One of the positive outcomes from the new legislation is that Finnish manufacturers are more and more interested in bringing new products on the market.

The use of dry toilets is promoted. That is an advantage in Finland, especially because many private holiday homes are built close to shorelines of lakes, the sea and other water bodies. Modern dry composting toilets are a promising technological means for reducing nutrient discharges in rural areas. Dry toilets save clean water, although in Finland the availability of water is usually not a problem. A further advantage is that dry toilets prevent the spread of disease that can occur when toilets are flushed with water. Let me mention here that the 3rd International Dry Toilet Conference will be held in the middle of August 2009 in Finland, at the Tampere University of Technology.

Another lesson we learned is that it is not a simple matter for an ordinary rural homeowner to invest in a wastewater treatment system. Hence, homeowners need to be properly informed and motivated. The selection of an effective and site-specific treatment method is important. In order to help the designers of wastewater systems, the Finnish Environment Institute is collecting independent, reliable and up-to-date information on

commonly used treatment methods and the performance of such methods. This information on wastewater treatment systems and their performance is accessible to everybody.

A third lesson is that financing plays an important role. The main idea is, according to the polluter pays principle, that each household is responsible for its own costs. In certain cases, however, Government subsidies may be granted. State subsidies for improving onsite wastewater treatment systems are available on social grounds, for example, for rural residents with low incomes. Residents can also claim tax deductions on the work done to improve wastewater systems. Some local authorities also provide support for improving wastewater systems on unconnected properties. Additionally, the Government can finance the construction of some connecting networks from rural areas to urban wastewater treatment plants.

At the international level these principles have been followed by the Helsinki Commission on the Protection of the Baltic Sea (HELCOM). The Commission adopted the recommendation "On-site wastewater treatment of single family homes, small businesses and settlements up to 300 person equivalents (p.e.)" at a ministerial meeting in autumn 2007.

We hope that these experiences can be applied also in other areas in the efforts to reach the global sanitation targets.

#### **Further information**

**[www.environment.fi](http://www.environment.fi)** > Environmental protection > Water protection > Wastewater treatment in rural areas