

Science for Environment Policy

Top 10 environmental issues for EU inland ports

The top 10 environmental priorities for EU inland ports have been identified in a recent survey. A port's relationship with the local community was the top environmental issue, followed by concerns over air and water quality. The survey provides the first benchmark of the environmental performance of inland ports, against which progress in their environmental management can be measured in the future.

Inland ports are sites, other than sea ports, which are specialised in the transfer of traded goods between different modes of [transport](#), such as ship, barge, rail or road. Inland ports have a strategic role to play in reducing transport emissions. They help to promote a shift away from pure road transport, which accounts for almost three-quarters of transport greenhouse gas (GHG) [emissions](#) in the EU¹, by providing easy access to alternative rail and inland waterway transport. Both of these transport modes are less polluting and more energy efficient than road transport.

In the EU, the importance of using alternative modes of transport to road haulage is recognised in a number of policies, including the revised [Trans-European Transport Network](#)² policy and the [Combined Transport Directive](#)³. As part of an [EU co-funded project](#)⁴, an environmental survey of European inland ports has been undertaken to help ports increase the environmental performance of their facilities.

The survey considered the special circumstances of inland ports, such as the dedicated resources they need to function; inland ports are relatively small ports that may be constrained by costs and by the lack of staff experienced to undertake environmental monitoring.

Based on a literature review and an Internet search of environmental performance data from a number of sources, including from the inland port sector, the [European Sea Ports Organisation](#) and other European projects (such as [EcoPorts](#)), as well as expert advice from members of the [European Federation of Inland Ports](#), the researchers divided the survey into four categories that are applicable to any environmental management system (EMS): (i) environmental management, (ii) environmental monitoring (iii) environmental priorities and (iv) green actions. The survey was piloted by four EU inland ports before a final version was distributed to other EU inland ports.

In all, operators from 27 inland ports across the EU responded to the survey, from which the top 10 environmental priorities for inland ports could be established for the first time. The relationship with the local community was ranked as the highest priority environmental concern with the other nine issues, in order of priority, being: [air](#) quality, [water](#) quality, port expansion (land related), garbage/port [waste](#), [soil](#) contamination, hazardous cargo, [noise](#), [energy](#) consumption and ship waste.

These 10 environmental priorities are almost identical to those of sea ports, although the ranking between the two is slightly different. For instance, air quality is the sea ports' top priority. This similarity, say the researchers, suggests that sea ports and inland ports can work together to tackle common environmental issues, which will help to promote the development of sustainable transport.

The survey revealed the importance of environmental management for inland ports, with approximately 70% of respondents saying they have key elements of an EMS in place. In addition, 22 of the 27 ports offered environmental awareness and training among their employees.

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Contact:
rm.darbra@upc.edu

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1. http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policie/s/transport/index_en.htm

2. http://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure/index_en.htm

3. [Council Directive 92/106/EEC of 7 December 1992 on the establishment of common rules for certain types of combined transport of goods between Member States.](#)

4. [PORTOPIA](#) is co-funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework programme.

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Top 10 environmental issues for EU inland ports (continued)

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5. www.eports.cat

Half of the respondent inland ports have an environmental monitoring programme, with almost 60% of them carrying out monitoring of waste. This survey of current programmes and priorities confirms established strengths and identifies scope for future improvements. The survey establishes a baseline for environmental practices, against which port authorities can track, monitor and report their progress in complying with environmental legislation.

Overall, two-thirds of the ports surveyed had implemented sustainability actions to reduce GHG emissions. Just over half of the ports offered liquefied natural gas (LNG) as an alternative fuel to oil for inland navigation and half the ports supplied onshore electrical power supplies to replace on-board auxiliary engines to reduce diesel consumption. Half of the ports offer differentiated fees for companies implementing environmentally-sound logistic choices, the most common being incentives to use inland waterways instead of other means of transport (i.e. railway, trucks).

As environmental issues and standards are viewed as pre-competitive by the port sector in Europe, inland ports with experience in the sustainable development of their facilities can mentor and share best practices with other ports, say the researchers. A model for such a concept (ports-assist-ports) already exists in the [EcoPorts Network](#). In addition, inland port operators can find help to develop their EMSs through a freely available tool (TEAP)⁵ designed to identify significant environmental impacts of their activities.

