

The Green Spider Network



The members of the Green Spider Network (GSN) are communication officers from national environmental ministries and agencies in Europe. The network is a forum for sharing information, ideas and best practices. It provides a platform for developing coordinated ways in which European environmental policies can most effectively be communicated to target groups. The network was established in 1995 and it now has roughly 50 members representing 30 countries. DG Environment uses the network as a channel for involving national institutions in its own communication activities.

Visit the Green Spider website at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/networks/greenspider/index_en.htm.

Katja Rosenbohm, European Environment Agency, President of GSN (2010-2011)



How is the EEA taking advantage of the Green Spider Network?

Katja: Collaborating with the Green Spider Network is a great forum for us and our network, the EIONET

(European Environmental Information and Observation Network), to exchange experiences and best practices regarding communication on environmental issues, thereby strengthening international cooperation.

The topic of the annual meeting in Copenhagen will be resource efficiency. What, in particular, will the GSN members learn about it?

Katja: GSN members will learn about future crises and issues Europe will face, such as the twin challenges of maintaining ecosystems and finding ways

to cut resource use in production and consumption. The GSN will also be presented with what is needed for a successful transition to a green economy.

What kind of good practices does the EEA have regarding resource efficiency?

Katja: The complexity of the theme requires the EEA's communication efforts to target specific audiences. For policy makers, the Agency intends to build a knowledge basis on the green economy. For the broader public, the Agency intends to make the information accessible through simple and relevant language. The key communication channel for both policy makers and the general public will be the EEA website, which will be updated regularly and will enable us to compile all the information under one umbrella.

Communicating Resource Efficiency

This year, the European Commission's environmental theme is resource efficiency, which refers to the sustainable use of the Earth's limited resources. The 'Roadmap to a Resource-Efficient Europe' sets objectives for resource efficiency and presents relevant actions. Resource efficiency is also a new topic for communication, since there have not been any previous campaigns to address such a global issue that is so closely connected to the everyday lives of citizens. The EC campaign started with a research phase, which showed that European citizens were rather unfamiliar with the concept, although after some information on the topic, it was discovered that action was already being

taken on resource use. Research showed that clear guidelines and action suggestions were needed to help people make the right choices. Based on these findings, the EC set the objective of the campaign, launched in the autumn of 2011: to develop a responsible consumption habit among citizens. By making resource efficiency mainstream, personal, easy and fun, the EC hopes to truly engage people in action through resource-efficient thinking. A positive tone is adopted, to avoid inducing guilt and compulsory actions. Online tools are used in order to foster easy and fast dissemination of the campaign messages.

Visit the EU resource efficiency webpage at www.ec.europa.eu/environment/resource_efficiency/index_en.htm.

Raising awareness about water

The European Union's environmental priority for 2012 will be water. Water scarcity and droughts affect many parts of Europe and evidence shows that they have been occurring with increased frequency over the past 30 years. Raising awareness among citizens, public authorities and private companies on the use of water is crucial to prevent shortages and to ensure good water quality in the future. Several initiatives already exist concerning this topic. The EU organised the 'Water System Information for Europe', better known as WISE, to centralise and disseminate information on water. The Danube Region, which includes parts of 8 EU countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and 6 non-EU countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldova), has been confronted with significant water-related challenges. On a regional level, Member States have

developed the 'EU Strategy for the Danube Region'. This initiative seeks to better connect the Danube Region, protect the environment, build prosperity through research, education, and information technologies, and improve cooperation among states. The strategy includes a public consultation on the topic in order to involve citizens. Some communication tools have also been provided to help Member States spread information about the strategy in their countries, such as leaflets, posters and newsletters.

The European Commission is planning awareness activities on water for 2012. Follow the latest developments via www.ec.europa.eu/environment/water/index_en.htm.

Learn more about the Danube Strategy by visiting http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm.

Plastic Bags are out of Style

Several Member States have taken action to reduce the use of plastic bags. The Green Spiders share what some of their countries are doing:

- In Ireland, a plastic bag tax introduced in 2002 reduced the use of plastic bags by 90%. The money collected from the tax was used for environmental projects and awareness-raising on environmental matters.

- The Italian Council of Ministers plans to launch two communication campaigns regarding this topic. The first one seeks to inform the community on how to properly dispose of plastic bags and to promote the use of recyclable bags, and the second one, the 'Porta la Sporta 2011' (Bring your Bag 2011) campaign intends

to serve as an incentive to reduce the use of disposable bags.

- Belgium adopted a 'packaging tax' which applies to disposable packaging. Most shops in the country do not provide single-use plastic carrier bags anymore and their use has decreased by 86% since 2003.

- In 2011, Bulgaria introduced a product fee for the use of polythene bags to encourage the use of textile, paper, and recyclable bags instead.

Other countries are planning actions on this topic: Portugal intends to promote the reduction of plastic bag use in conventional purchases and supermarkets by 2013. Austria also has a growing interest in banning the use of plastic bags, and the use of reusable plastic bags has become a popular practice in Lithuania.

Gabriele Obermayr, of the Austrian winning team of the friendly annual best practice competition in 2010, speaks about their experience with the award-winning initiative:



What is the 'vielfaltleben' campaign about?

Austria: 'Vielfaltleben' ('living-diversity') is a joint initiative between the Austrian Federal

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment & Water Management and three Austrian NGOs. It was launched in January 2009 and will continue until the end of 2013. The objectives are to raise general awareness on biodiversity, to contribute to the end of biodiversity loss in Austria, and to actively engage various audiences in nature protection.

What kind of communication tools are used?

Austria: Various communication tools are

being used, ranging from media cooperation, internet, publications, to special activities. A beehive was installed on the roof of the Vienna Opera House with a live-stream in order to raise awareness about the importance of bees as pollinators, and many activities such as excursions, exhibitions, and competitions were organised.

What are your latest initiatives?

Austria: In November 2010 a first "stock-taking" of the achievements of two years of 'vielfaltleben' was carried out and celebrated in a gala in the Vienna Opera House. Our very last initiative: the honey harvested from the beehive on the Opera House was one of the little gifts ladies were given at the famous Viennese Opera Ball.

EU Presidency Communications

As EU Member States take turns in presiding over the Council of the European Union, national environmental authorities become involved in communicating their country's priorities and initiatives for their EU presidency term. It is a great challenge for communication officers to be at the heart of the European environmental agenda for six months.

Magdalena Cheda, network member from the Polish Ministry of the Environment, talks about the Polish EU presidency



What will your tasks be for the upcoming presidency?

Magdalena: The Polish Presidency will allow the Ministry of the Environment to focus its

attention on environmental questions that are of special importance to Europe in 2011. Our goal is to coordinate the work of Member States. The Ministry of the Environment wants the Polish Presidency to be a green one. It is encouraging governmental agencies to order products and services with the lowest environmental impact possible. We also want to show the environmental potential of Poland and our accomplishments as important experiences, which can lead to the shaping of a common EU environmental protection policy.

What are the priorities for the Polish presidency?

Magdalena: The three environmental priorities will be preventing climate change and preparing Europe for adaptation, protecting biodiversity and promoting the efficient use of resources. We also want to support the European Union preparations for the Rio + 20 Sustainable Growth initiative.

Is there anything else you would like to share with the network?

Magdalena: We would like to share our experiences with GSN members regarding communication and the promotion of environmental themes. This includes the implementation of the Green Basic Rules at all stages of preparations and during the Polish Presidency, the cooperation with non-governmental ecological organisations, and educational undertakings.

Networking with the GSN

The Green Spider Network is collaborating on communication matters with environmental stakeholders, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as with other networks. By collaborating with other networks such as the EIONET (European Environmental Information and Observation Network from the EEA), the Green Spider Network contributes to international cooperation. The network can for instance contribute constructively to the work of the expert group mentioned in Article 6 of the UNFCCC, thereby strengthening its results. This article calls on governments to promote public awareness and a better understanding of climate change, to increase public access to information, and to promote training of specialised scientific, technical and administrative personnel in climate science and management.

The GSN is a well-established interlocutor of the European Commission, as Katarzyna Wolos from DG Environment explains:

"In preparing for a major information campaign for the general public on resource efficiency, the Directorate General for the Environment of the European Commission has cooperated with the Green Spider Network. Green Spiders have taken part in our 'brainstorming workshop' and have

efficiently contributed to the preparations for the launching of the campaign. We look forward to continue working with the network during the campaign and in spreading the message in their countries."



"Whenever I need an overview on an environmental communication issue, I know whom to turn to", says Carina Vopel, the Deputy Head of Communication at DG Environment. "I think the Green Spiders are already known as the European reference in this field."

EECN Secretariat

Assistance is provided through the EECN Secretariat, currently run by the French company BIO Intelligence Service. Apart from practical support to the network, the Secretariat actively disseminates best practices to a wider public through the EECN newsflash and the website.

Regular newsflashes

The EECN newsflash is issued every two months and distributed to subscribers in and outside Europe. It deals with topics related to environmental communication and awareness-raising. Recent topics include an overview of programmes that co-finance environmental communication projects and the 2011 International Year of Forests.

Subscribe to EECN news

If you would like to subscribe to the EECN news service, contact the EECN Secretariat by email at EECN_Secretariat@biois.com. All past issues of the EECN newsflash are available at www.ec.europa.eu/environment/networks/news_en.htm.

Printed on recycled paper - Designed by Charlotte Haour for BIO Intelligence Service

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*Observer

