

Brussels, 08 October 2007

## **Commission to help small and medium-sized companies become greener**

*Helping small and medium-sized companies use energy and resources efficiently is the aim of a recently published Commission Communication. It does this by providing a legal framework and measures that reinforce existing policies and initiatives in line with the particular characteristics of smaller companies. To this end the Communication proposes to create a programme to help small and medium-sized companies implement European environmental legislation. The programme will channel financial resources towards support networks, simplify access to environmental management systems, and promote greater awareness of environmental issues among these companies.*

European Commissioner for the Environment Stavros Dimas said: "To successfully tackle the environmental challenges we face and to achieve our targets on greenhouse emissions, renewable energy and energy efficiency, all European companies must be on board. Small and medium-sized companies are an integral part of Europe's economy and it is therefore vital that they play their part in making the European economy more sustainable."

### **Small and medium-sized companies and the environment**

Individual small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) employ less than 250 people, but the European Union's 23 million SMEs as a whole represent about 99% of all EU enterprises and 57% of the Union's total economic added value. Being responsible for such a large percentage of the EU economy's turnover the impact of SMEs on the environment is significant.

Many companies are not aware of the impact their activities have on the environment and a majority actually think that their activities have little or no impact. SMEs also tend to believe that they are complying with legislation unless told otherwise. Under such circumstances the activities of SMEs may pose significant health and safety risks to workers as well as a threat to the environment.

And by not integrating environmental considerations into their economic activities SMEs could lose also out on the economic benefits presented by better environmental management and eco-innovation.

### **Environmental Compliance Assistance Programme**

The Environmental Compliance Assistance Programme proposed by the Commission is a set of measures that aim to help SMEs minimise the environmental impact of their activities and to facilitate compliance with existing legislation. The Programme intends to reduce the burden of compliance by designing instruments and policies to integrate environmental concerns into the core of SME activities.

The measures presented in the Communication also cover the dissemination of information specifically targeted for SMEs, promoting support networks, and training activities that build local environmental expertise.

Funding for the Programme's measures will come from LIFE+ funds (€5 million for 2007-13) with additional funds to be made available through the Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme (CIP) and the Structural Funds.

Several measures are already planned for 2007. A website providing information on EU environmental policy for SMEs is now available in seven languages and guides on energy efficiency, air emissions, soil and water and waste are planned. A handbook on funding opportunities will also be published.

The new network replacing the Euro Info Centre Network in support of business and innovation will participate in implementing the Programme from 2008. This and other SME support networks will play an important role in helping SMEs translate European environmental policies into operational measures.

### **Promoting good practices**

The Staff Working Document attached to the Communication presents a selection of case studies and examples of good practice from SMEs across Europe and the world. The document is available on the Commission website.

### **More information**

SME and environment website:

<http://www.ec.europa.eu/environment/sme>

Good practice case studies:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/sme/cases/case\\_study\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/sme/cases/case_study_en.htm)