

Climate change hits water supplies hardest

by Emily Smith

"Water is as big an issue as climate change," according to Sergiy Moroz of the WWF Global Freshwater Programme.

He welcomed the green paper on adaptation to climate change, published last Friday (29 June), which highlighted water as a main resource threatened by global warming.

Moroz says the importance of this threat cannot be underestimated.

"Water resources will be the first affected by global warming," he says, "even if the target to keep temperature increases below two degrees centigrade is met."

The WWF freshwater programme encourages countries around the world to adopt an environmental approach to water policy, as a first step towards dealing with climate change and water scarcity. This means taking resource conservation and the avoidance of pollution into account for every water sector, from crop irrigation and drinking water access, to river navigation and dam construction.

"The 2000 Water Framework Directive puts this approach into law for Europe; we are trying to promote the same idea around the world," says Moroz.

But he adds that even the EU has so far failed to accept the urgency of the measures set out in the WFD, with a majority of countries lagging behind implementation deadlines.

Notably, the directive sets out to apply the 'polluter pays' principle, according to which those responsible for

environmental degradation have to bear the costs.

WWF claims that many water management plans submitted by member states under the WFD exclude sectors with a heavy effect on water sources, such as hydropower generation, from liability.

"Where this is the case," said Moroz, "it is very likely it will be the citizens who pay the cost, through rising water bills, while industries which pollute get an easy ride."

- European environmentalists have come up with a novel way to reduce the need for water. A water-free toilet won the sanitation prize at a conference in Vienna last month, to assess developments in the World Health Organisation's Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE).

More environmentally friendly than the classic portable loo, the 'Ecosan' toilet uses no chemicals. Instead, ashes, soil and wood dust reduce smells and the risk of infection.

The Ecosan was developed by a Romanian pressure group, 'Women for a clean future', and has already been used in Romania, Bulgaria, and several non-EU former Soviet states.

"This is something that's good for health and good for the environment," says Diana Smith, a lobbyist for the Health and Environment Alliance. "It produces fertilizer from human waste and means people have greater access to non-smelly toilets and improved hygiene."

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