New Agencies on Environmental Health and Nuclear Safety

Parliament voted on 6 February to create a new agency charged with advising the government on health and safety risks posed by human activities that alter the physical environment. The Agence Francaise de Sécurité Sanitaire Environnementale (AFSSE) is the third such advisory body created since the present government came to power in 1997.

The AFSSE will, like its food safety and medical safety counterparts, have the power to launch investigations, conduct scientific analysis, advise the government on risk management, and render its findings public. It will report directly to the Environment and Health ministries, but its field of action will be open to studying the environmental health and safety risks posed by all sectors, including agriculture, industry, and transport.

It is thought that the new agency will play a growing role in regulatory activity over sectors including chemical and biological products, electromagnetics, noise, and radioactivity.

Parliamentarians also approved the creation of an agency that will combine existing nuclear safety and radioactivity protection activities carried out by competing agencies into a single body.

The new Institut de Radioprotection et de Sureté Nucléaire (IRSN) will bring together the civilian nuclear safety activities carried out by the Institute of Protection and Nuclear Safety (IPSN) with related radioactivity monitoring carried out by the Office of Radiation Protection (OPRI).

Czech Republic

Problems with Waste Law

On 10 January 2001, the Constitutional Court struck down a request to invalidate a section of the current waste law regarding the assessment of collection fees. The Act allows municipalities to collect fees to pay for refuse collection either by imposing a "waste fee" on each resident of the municipality or by charging a fee based on the amount of waste an entity generates.

In May 2000, a group of senators filed a complaint with the Court, arguing that the waste law was unconstitutional because it allowed the imposition of fees regardless of whether a citizen or company produces waste. The Court decided that the municipal fees were constitutional.

A new act on waste which, unlike the current law, complies with European Union waste law, was submitted to Parliament in September 2000 and is still in committee. The European Integration Committee is also discussing it. The Environment Minister, Milos Kuzvart, expects this new Act to be approved by both houses of parliament and signed into law during 2001.

The Parliament is said to favour integrating the two approaches related to fees contained in the current law and placing the integrated formula into the waste bill currently in parliament. Under this proposal, a collection fee would be paid by most municipal entities. A second fee would be levied on the amount of waste produced. The Chairman of the parliamentary committee dealing with the bill, has said he favours integrating both fee models because everyone producing waste should pay at least a nominal fee for refuse collection. Imposing additional fees dependent on the amount of rubbish generated will reward those who recycle and minimise their waste stream.