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**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION POLICY IS AN IMPORTANT
ELEMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH****POLITYKA OCHRONY ŚRODOWISKA W POLSCE WAŻNYM ELEMENTEM
ZDROWIA PUBLICZNEGO****SUMMARY**

Poland belongs to a group of countries, which emits the largest amounts of pollution into the atmosphere. Environmental degradation causes most dramatic effects, one of them being shortening the average life span of general population. This is why creating well functioning systems of environmental protection within European regions, individual countries, and all over the world is so important.

Since 1990 Poland's environmental system has been undergoing a gradual overhaul in economy, specifically pertaining to water and air quality, as well as solid waste management and creating an integrated pollution prevention system.

Key words: amounts of pollution, protection of environmental, public health.

STRESZCZENIE

Polska należy do krajów z największą emisją zanieczyszczeń do atmosfery. Degradacja środowiska pociąga za sobą coraz bardziej dramatyczne skutki w postaci m.in. skażenia środowiska i obniżania się przeciętnej długości życia człowieka. Dlatego tak ważne dla zdrowia publicznego wydaje się stworzenie dobrze funkcjonującego systemu ochrony środowiska, nie tylko na szczeblu poszczególnych państw, ale i regionów europejskich, a także całego świata.

Od roku 1990 w Polsce dokonywana jest stopniowa przebudowa systemu prawa w sferze przede wszystkim: jakości wód, jakości powietrza, gospodarki odpadami i stworzenia zintegrowanego systemu zapobiegania zanieczyszczeniom.

Słowa kluczowe: emisja zanieczyszczeń, ochrona środowisko, zdrowie publiczne.

INTRODUCTION

Public health simply means health of the general population, and as such is considered to be a public institution. It is not treated as an individual good, but public good. Public Health includes a wide range of multidisciplinary activities linked with various aspects of human health and its protection. The goal of Public Health is not

only illness prevention, prolonging of life span, promoting physical exercising, but above all, organized activities, environmental hygiene and environmental protection.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The institution that is responsible for environmental protection in Poland is public administration, especially local governments and business entities. The Ministry of Environment is responsible for preparing goals of ecological policy in the country, and also laws pertaining to air, water, soil, forests and natural resources in general. Realization and execution of environmental protection laws on the local and country wide level is the responsibility of the Inspectorate of Environmental Protection. This is an independent organization supervised by the Ministry of Environment, which supervises five research institutes such as: Institute of Water Economy and Meteorology, Environmental Protection, Ecology of Industrial Areas Institute, Forestry Research Institute, and State Geologic Institute. Controlling of chemical substances in potable waters is the Health Care Minister's Responsibility [1]. According to the provisions of the "round table" accords, policy of environmental protection should enable a complete implementation of ecological development conception, adjusted for free market economy or, in other words, a program of economic and social restructuring. Technological solutions aiming at environmental protection and recognizing the nature as having value was also the part of these accords.

The first draft of government's program dealing with ecological development often described as "The Outline of Country's Environmental Protection Policy" was presented to the Polish Parliament (Sejm) in July of 1990. In September 1990 the Minister of Environmental Protection submitted the second draft of the document entitled "Ecological Policy". In May 1991 the Parliament passed government's "Country's Ecological Policy", while recognizing environmental protection as the matter of the highest importance [2].

The next stage of ecological policy development past 1991 was prepared and accepted in 2000 by the Committee of Ministers Council for regional policy and balanced growth, followed by Ministers Council. In May 2001, this document approved by the government was presented to the parliament's Commission of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry. The new version of Country's Ecological Policy dated 2001 defines 12 principles of this policy [3].

The fundamental and first principle is the *principle of balanced growth*. Its main assumption is to conduct such policy and actions, which would maintain continuance of natural processes functioning, the biological variety in terms of scenic values as well as maintaining variety of species and genes. On the other hand this principle means the necessity of interfering by the state into matters of environmental protection.

The second principle is *the principle of caution*, which says that proper course of pro ecological action should be taken when there is a probable cause to believe that

a given problem requires some solution, not when there is a scientific proof for the problem. Legislation had, primarily, in mind environmental protection having a high and safe level of quality.

The next, third principle pertains to *interfering of environmental policy with policies of other sectors' policies* and this means that there is a need to consider ecological goals at parity with economic goals.

The fourth is the principle of *Equal Access to the Natural Environment* in such a way that the material and civilization related needs will satisfy presently living and future generations. At stake here is ensuring that humans will be able to function in a healthy and safe environment with simultaneous preservation basic natural processes while continually protecting the variety of biological species [4].

The fifth is the *principle of regionalisation*. This principle places on local and regional governments the necessity to establish regular fees, or in some cases reductions of such fees for business entities. This principle serves as a countrywide device to promote ecological policies in regions, which were ecologically degraded due to the presence of processing industries, agricultural activities and regions that underwent considerable economic transformation, but had been in the past valued as regions having pure natural environment.

The sixth principle is that of socialization. This principle should be realized thru creating institutional, legal and material conditions for citizenry, social groups, and non governmental agencies, in shaping a model of balanced growth in coordination with developing ecologic consciousness, sensitivity, and education, all of which aimed to create new ethical behaviors toward the environment.

Principle seven is: "*polluter pays*". This sounds clear, full responsibility, including financial, for the effects of polluting and causing other environmental endangerments is placed on its doer, i.e. entities or individuals using the environment.

The next, eight, is the principle of *prevention*. The chief assumption in this principle is that preventing negative environmental effects should be undertaken during the planning stage as well as realization of action all based on possessed knowledge, implemented procedures of evaluating environmental impacts and monitoring undertakings [4].

The ninth principle of ecologic policy is the *principle of employing the best known techniques (BAT)*, including the best accessible ones. Implementing of this principle should follow legal instruments and other action mechanisms (ex. freewill agreements, recommendations, development of environmental management systems).

Tenth principle is *the principle of substitution*. This principle was planned by the European Union Treaty. According to this principle the European Union should begin action when the aims of proposed actions can not be achieved by a member country. According to the Polish Ecological Policy this means that the regions and localities will gradually take over parts of competences and deciding power related to environmental protection, so they can be handled effectively at the lowest possible level of government.

The eleventh principle is the *principle permitting employing more stringent requirements in defined areas* (named in the new ecological policy a principle of protective clauses). This principle is widely used in European Union. The principle of protective clauses enables member countries, in justified cases, more stringent means of regulation than those employed by the European Union ecological laws. Applying this principle will enable realization of the above mentioned principle of regionalisation and application of adequate legal and economic instruments within the areas where a high degree of development and environmental degradation occurred.

The twelfth is the principle of *ecological and economic effectiveness*. This principle is used while selecting planned environmental protection investment undertakings, and after their completion, evaluation of results and their impact [3].

This document also defines the goals of ecological policy. Goals of this policy are categorized as strategic and tactical, short range, medium and long range term. The strategic and tactical goals will be discussed below. These seem to be divided and independent of each other in terms of environmental policy. Strategic goals are, among others, the following ones:

- adjusting policies of sectors to the goals of balanced growth and protecting natural resources (water, minerals, ground surface and soils, air, agricultural and wild forest products) and implementation in all sectors of economy pro ecological models of production (resources conserving and low waste technologies as well as pro ecological systems of management and organization);
- raising environmental quality of all elements and aspects (air, waters, soils, ecosystems, species and their natural habitats, climate and natural landscapes) as well as all specific areas of the country (towns, settlements, degraded areas, agricultural land, forested areas, marshes, river valleys, mountainous, coastal areas and sea territorial waters also lands characterized by a great biological variety);
- further reduction of pollution emissions and environmental burdens, also excessive reducing natural resources;
- limiting excessive consumption demands on the environment by shaping proper consumption models and also pro ecologic system of values in the spirit of balanced growth;
- making sure that the society has access to information about the environment and its share in making decisions including the ability to litigate matters concerning environment;
- ensuring that the Polish Ecological Policy coincides with directions and the range of similar policies adopted by the European Union;
- promoting balanced growth in the international contacts, this points out this simple matter, which is just fulfilling obligations that Poland accepted by signing international agreements and conventions and also while becoming a participant in new ones [5].

Various goals, tactical in character, are: refining legal administrative and economic mechanisms regulating using the environment, refining structures of environmental

management, negotiations with EU about a necessity of introducing transitional periods in respect to fulfilling union's environment related requirements [5].

Ecological Policy of the State usually pertains to water resources management and waste water management, air quality and solid waste management.

Poland is among European countries which emit largest amounts of pollutants to the atmosphere. This is resulting from our systems of energy producing, our systems are almost entirely based on coal and lignite burning, raw materials industries having a large share of in the country's industrial profile and poorly developed environmental protection installations and system. Upper Silesia and South-Western regions of Poland receive additional injections of pollution from Germany Czech Republic and Slovakia. A significant impact has the fact that 99,8% of Poland is within Baltic Sea watershed and our two largest rivers Wisła and Odra, carry lots of nitrogen and phosphorus to Baltic Sea. A large number of industrial and municipal waste water treatment plants is not adequate for the needs.

Salinity of Polish rivers is a specific problem resulting from mining of lignite. General condition of Polish waters and water deficit are alarming [6]. This is why postulates for water resources and water wastes economy are: to implement mechanisms reducing municipal water usage, as well as waste water levels; improving the quality of surface waters thru building and modernizations of waste water treatment plants in industrial plants and urban agglomerations, modernizing of water supply lines and discharges reduction of saline water from mines to surface waters. Such actions have impact on the potable water quality [4].

The next and constantly growing problem is amount of generated solid wastes, especially industrial ones. Just in Śląski region about 2 billion tones were collected. Recycling refuse and its neutralization is at the beginning stage. This is why the waste management economy is, at this time, focused on programs aimed at reducing amounts of generated refuse, both municipal and industrial. New technologies of recycling are being implemented, the amounts of wastes deposited in landfills are to be limited thru introducing new technologies, producing minimum wastes or practically none; new systems of initial waste selection and its recycling are being implemented [4-6].

Air contamination results in environmental deterioration. European men average lifespan is 72 years of age, an average European woman 78. Poland's corresponding figures are 68 and 75. Some regions average, ex. Śląsk even lower. Genetic codes make up also changed in this region. This phenomenon leads me to a belief, that general health of the population shows a correlation with the quality of environment. Therefore, there are programs being implemented to counteract the global climate changes such as: emissions of SO₂ reduction, improving of air quality in metropolitan areas where concentration standards are exceeded, and reducing gases and dusts emissions being the first priority [5, 7].

In reference to the above it seems obvious that the young generations should be taught the subject of ecology. Realization of goals related to improving environmental quality requires social acceptance and building a new value system. All systems

of education can serve as educators, these are: schools, institutions of higher learning, non governmental organizations, church and media. Poland's integration with the European Union forces the Polish Government to educate citizens in this respect [8, 9].

Within the educational requirements there are provisions to create systems of accessing information about the condition of environment and pertinent legislation by local governments. Representatives of environmentally conscious groups should sit on boards of environmental funds, ensuring that the society can have influence on evaluating environmental impacts that various undertakings, plans and programs may have on the environment, and enable presentations containing environmental concerns in popular medias and institutions of recreation and culture propagation centers [4].

While ending, it is worthwhile to mention tools and methods of realization the Polish Environmental Protection Policy, these are:

- 1) legal and administrative – i.e. laws, decrees, strategies, policies and directives,
- 2) control systems and monitoring,
- 3) education of ecological subjects,
- 4) scientific researches.

During 2000-2001 Poland adopted a legal system that is based on European Union Laws. The most important documents in this area are:

- Law of April 27, 2001 the Law of Environmental Protection (Dz.U.2001.62);
- Act dated March 3, 2000 about wastes and changes of some acts (Dz.U.2000.22.272);
- Act dated July 18, 2001 – water law (Dz.U. 2001.115.1229);
- Act dated October 16, 1991 about environmental protection with later amendments, dated December 7, 2000 (Dz.U.2001.3.21);
- Act of May 11, 2001 about goods' packaging and generation of packaging wastes (Dz.U. 2001.63.638);
- Act of May 11, 2001 about duties placed on business owners to handle some wastes, fees and deposits concerning wastes (Dz.U. 2001.63.639);
- Act dated June 22, 2001 about organisms and microorganisms genetically modified (Dz.U. 2001.76.811);
- Act dated March 2001, about substances depleting ozone layer (Dz.U. 2001.52.537);
- Act dated November 29, 2000 nuclear substances law (Dz.U. 2001.3.18);
- Act dated January 11, 2001 about substances and chemical preparations (Dz.U. 2001.11.84), Act of July 26, 2000 about fertilizers and fertilizing (Dz.U. 2000.89.991);
- Act dated June 7, 2001, about municipal water supply and waste waters discharging (Dz.U. 2001.72.747);
- Act dated July 27, 2001 about introducing the Law of environmental Protection, solid wastes handling and changes of selected laws (Dz.U 2001.100.1085).

Besides acts, decrees pertaining to environmental protection the most important law impacting all actions realizing goals of Polish Ecological Policy (PEP) is in the

Polish Constitution. The 1997 Polish Constitution stresses the role of peoples' activity in relation to environmental protection. This is done by placing defined duties on the governmental bodies (art. 74. pass. 4), on the other hand it gives rights to individual citizens (art. 74, pass. 3). The constitution guarantees every citizen the right to obtain information about the state of the natural environment and its protection [10].

Researches dealing with the natural environment has been conducted in Poland since the thirties.

Researches currently include all sectors of the natural environment, this means air, waters, soils, and such researches are conducted at all levels of government: local, regional and country wide. The Polish Government made a decision to monitor the quality of environment at the central level in 1990 (PMŚ – Countrywide Environmental Monitoring). This was done to create a coherent system of researching and collecting information on the subject. This system aims at disseminating information around the country about tendencies characterizing the quality of environment in Poland, so local and regional governments could use such information to make decisions.

Monitoring of the natural environment is left in the hands of Central Inspectorate of Environmental Protection. The statute of this institution declares it to be "the system of measurements, estimates and prognoses pertaining to the quality of natural environment, prepared by units of the central and local administrations, as well as by universities, institutes and industry" [11]. Thus Countrywide Environmental Monitoring (PMŚ) unifies all activities monitoring environmental quality in Poland. The State Inspector of the Central Inspectorate of Environmental Protection is the coordinator in the Country Environmental Monitoring.

In the general view, the job of monitoring is:

- providing the knowledge about current conditions of natural environment in all its sectors, including information about links between sectors;
- facilitating comparisons between existing conditions and a goal or standards, creating this way proper conditions to set priorities;
- creating basis for actions during disaster situations when the environmental quality reaches point of no acceptance (ex. contamination of air or water);
- creating the basis for documenting changes in environmental quality for better or worse.

As far as environmental education, which was mentioned above, I would like to bring attention to the activities done by non governmental agencies. We are a consumption society, which chooses profits over environmental protection. The truth is that it depends on our choice if we will be able to balance this way of treating this world. The truth is that the chance to have a good quality of life on Earth depends on respecting natural laws and conscious actions. Here, I will bring up activities of Gaja Club, which leads countrywide campaigns aimed at natural environment protection and programs protecting rivers and river valleys, wild animals and trees. This club does this from the very beginning of its existence. On September 30 the Worldwide River Day is observed as an annual event, on October 10, we observe the Tree Day [12].

CONCLUSION

The state of ecological consciousness in Polish society was characterized by a strong feeling of fear in the beginning of the transformation decade, which happened at the beginning of the nineties. This fear was caused by the effect of so called “Chernobyl Syndrome”, and the lack of knowledge in the area of ecology. There was no system of environmental education and official information was censored due to the political system at that time. Luckily this changed considerably.

The world stopped to identify environmental protection solely with technical activities, and solving environmental problems is included in economic policies. Presently equally important is shaping social consciousness in relation to clean environment.

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