

Newsletter Issue 1/2024

On Monday 29th of January 2024, the EU co-legislators reached a provisional political agreement on the [Commission's proposal revising the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive](#).

Context:

[The current urban wastewater treatment directive was adopted in 1991](#). The objective of this directive is to 'protect the environment from adverse effects of wastewater discharges from urban sources and specific industries. The Commission conducted an evaluation of the directive in 2019. This evaluation confirmed that the implementation of the directive has led to a significant reduction in pollutant releases. One of the key reasons for the directive's effectiveness lies in the simplicity of its requirements, which allows for straightforward enforcement. However, the evaluation showed that there are still sources of pollution that are not yet adequately addressed by the current rules. Additionally, the evaluation highlighted the urban wastewater sector as one of the largest consumers of energy in the public sector.

In October 2022, the Commission tabled a proposal to revise the urban wastewater treatment directive.

What's new?

The new text contains the following:

- An additional treatment removing a broad spectrum of micropollutants ('quaternary treatment') will be mandatory for all plants over 150.000 p.e. (and over 10.000 p.e. based on a risk assessment) by 2045.
- Strengthening of the monitoring of various public health parameters as well as chemical pollutants, including so-called "forever chemicals" (PFAS) and microplastics.
- Introduction of an energy neutrality target, meaning that by 2045 urban wastewater treatment plants will have to produce energy from renewable sources, based on regular energy audits, with progressive intermediate targets. This energy can be produced on or off-site, and up to 35% of non-fossil energy can be purchased from external sources. This percentage only applies to the final target.
- Better implementation of the Polluter Pays Principle with the creation of the EPR scheme 80% financed at least by industry.

Next Steps:

The European Parliament and the Council are set to formally adopt the new Directive. Following publication in the Official Journal of the EU, it will become effective in just 20 days. Member States will kickstart the implementation process, with updated national programs due by 2026.