

The Environmental Protection and Public Health Department

The Environmental Protection and Public Health Committee is an executive authority with responsibility for matters relating to the outdoor and indoor environment as well as issues covering food control and health protection. The Environmental Protection and Public Health Department supervises these areas working to minimise environmental problems. The activities carried out by personnel in this department is based on the environmental legislation which also authorises the right to take legal action in the event of environmental or health hazard.

The Department, staffed by skilled and highly qualified specialists, has four main operational areas: health protection (indoor and outdoor), food control and environmental protection. There are many similarities in the every day activities carried out by the staff working with environmental protection and food control. Both groups conduct inspections, take samples and also provide advice and information to the companies they supervise. The Department also ensures the companies introduce and participate in control programmes which are put in place to guarantee the compliance of their obligations. In the area of health protection the goal is to protect the public from health-related environmental risks. Complaints from members of the general public often initiate investigations that are also regarded as having major preventive impact. Staff working in this field employ a number of different means to make people and companies adopt measures, such as providing advice, persuasion or education, but, if necessary, the Department can also take juridical proceedings.

Health Protection

The goal for the health protection area is to protect the public from environmental health risks, with good housing coming high up on most people's list of priorities for a decent standard of living. The average housing standard in Sweden is high and work in this area is concentrated to specific housing problems, which include radon and noise pollution. Additional areas where personnel are involved are of a more general character such as temperature, mould, humidity, odour and poor ventilation, which often can be related to "sick" buildings. These issues are covered in the Environmental Code that also contains regulations for beaches, swimming pools, beauty parlours etc. The Environmental Protection and Public Health Department put in place regulations and controls of small sewage systems covering both function as well as sanitation. The Department also deals with sanitary problems related to waste collection and disposal, all of which are covered by the Environmental Code.

Monitoring pollution levels is fundamental to the work of the Department. If pollution levels are too high, the health of both the public and the environment can be at risk. Levels of air pollution in the municipality is closely monitored and communicated to the public. This information is also used to predict and simulate the consequences of changes in the city planning. The Department is also responsible for monitoring contamination levels in soil and water.

Food Control

Staff, involved in monitoring food hygiene, ensure that the Swedish food legislation, with subordinate regulations, including drinking water regulations are followed. Within the boundaries covered by relevant legislation, the aim is to ensure that the food offered to consumers is safe and of specified quality. The Department achieves this in a number of ways, for example:

- providing advice and information to businesses operating within the food sector
- introducing control programmes for businesses operating within the food sector by identifying critical control points (controlling temperature)
- sampling the food and drinking water
- investigating cases of food-poisoning
- providing training courses for people working in the food business
- visiting and approving new food premises
- authorising temporary food sales points
- inspecting existing food premises
- checking labelling of packaged food
- providing training and information in dietetics.

The Department also cooperates with other authorities and organisations to ensure safe and consistent monitoring of food handling in all areas within all parts of the country.

Environmental Protection

Previously Sweden had a number of laws relating to environmental issues but since 1999 the majority have been included in the Environmental Code which covers all matters relating to pollution from environmentally dangerous operations. The Environmental Protection and Public Health Department supervises, for example, industrial plants, agriculture and wastewater treatment plants as well as monitoring how companies manage chemicals and hazardous chemical waste etc.

Due to size, production volume, type of pollution, environmental hazard estimate etc. plants are divided in to three different categories;

- those that require a licence from the Environmental Court
- those that need a licence from the County Administrative Board
- those that are required to report to the local Environmental Protection and Public Health Department.

The supervising authorities are, in the first case, the County Administrative Board and, in the two following cases, the local Environmental Administration.

Large plants are required to submit reports annually detailing information relating to production, pollution and use of chemicals. Samples are regulated through monitoring programmes.

At intervals of between one and three years the plants have to be inspected by an independent environmental protection consultant who is a specialist in the actual business of the company in question. The evaluation from the inspection will be submitted to the supervising authority, as do any changes carried out in the plant that impact on the environmental status. Visits to smaller plants also take place, often in conjunction with projects and campaigns relating to a specific area of operation, such as industrial painters or printers, car repair shops and similar.

In the event of accidents during the transportation of chemicals, oil and other environmentally hazardous substances, the Department ensures that treatment and decontamination of affected soil and water is carried out. Identification and decontamination of land that has previously been contaminated by toxic chemicals or waste and is considered a potential danger to health or to the surrounding environment is also under the supervision of the Department.

Levels of air pollution are continually monitored in the city centre and an additional two places in the countryside (for background information). If air pollution levels are too high, the health of both the public and the environment can be at risk. The information gained is used for national statistics, in city planning as well as being available to the public.

Environmental protection activities today often take the form of prevention with information becoming increasingly important. A number of companies work with environmental management systems, such as ISO 14 000 and EMAS, with the Department taking care of enquiries and complaints. Environmental protection is an area of growing interest, both to the public as well as businesses. To meet the increasing demand for information, the Environmental Protection and Public Health Committee produces information material and brochures that are available in paper form as well as on the Internet.

The Environmental Protection and Public Health Committee has close cooperation with the County Administrative Board, which is the regional environmental body. The Boards supervise the largest industrial plants in the county as well as activities relating to nature conservation and agriculture. The County Administrative Board is also the authorising body which hears appeals by the general public regarding decisions made by the local Environmental Committee.

There is close cooperation between the Environmental Protection and Public Health Committee, other local Environmental Administrations in the county and cities of a similar size as Linköping. This co-operation is profitable for all concerned encouraging the exchange of ideas as well as providing the opportunity to compare various work methods and the application of legislation. Such an example is a project involving chemicals and a recently published book dealing with the handling and storage of chemicals. This book contains practical advice as well as information relating to legislation and restrictions.

The main business areas in Linköping are agriculture, food production, electronics (Ericsson), aircraft production (Saab), engineering and chemical metal finishing.