



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Soil sealing – an ever increasing problem at European level
- Information from the Austrian delegation, supported by the
Luxembourg delegation

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Austrian delegation, supported by the Luxembourg delegation on the above subject, which will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Environment Council meeting on 6 March 2015.

Soil sealing – an ever increasing problem at European level

- Information from the Austrian delegation, supported by the Luxembourg delegation -

Soil sealing is a problem in most if not in all EU Member States. Data from the European Environment Agency (EEA) show that annually around 1000 km² of soil is damaged and half of it is permanently sealed. Soil sealing affects biodiversity, water resources, climate change, food production, raw materials etc and its impact is **even growing**. More than 75% of Europeans live in cities already, with a tendency to rise.

On the occasion of the World Soil Day on 5 December 2014, Austria organized a conference where this ever growing problem has also been discussed and which marked one of our contributions to the **International Year of Soil 2015**. This year is an excellent moment to take stock of where we stand at European and regional level.

At European level the European Commission, jointly with MS experts, established the **Guidelines on best practice to limit, mitigate and compensate soil sealing**. Furthermore, the Commission within its **Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe** has proposed an *aim to achieve no net land take by 2050*. On a more **regional** level, several initiatives have been taken forward, such as a **Communiqué** co-signed by Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and Austria in 2014, also aiming at reducing soil sealing.

The International Year of Soil will be accompanied by a magnitude of events that take up the issue of soil in various contexts; for instance the EU Green Week or the EXPO in Milano, but also within various Member States. This shows clearly that soil protection is not only a European problem but one that has to be dealt with on national, regional and local levels.

Nevertheless **constant awareness-raising is key**, since many policies are influencing the quantity of soil availability – transport policy, infrastructure, urban development, energy production, infrastructure and others. The use of Structural Funds influences soil policy as well as the forthcoming EFSI (European Fund for Strategic Investment). For effectively addressing soil sealing, more data is required, where we see a role for the European Environment Agency, and we need further exchange of good practice. Additionally, we believe that we should use measures applied by Member States in the context of the rural development programme and to use knowledge gained from its evaluation.

In order to foster a **holistic approach** to soil sealing, Austria believes that the issue should be **discussed at the Environment Council**. We encourage all Member States and the Commission to make use of the International Year of Soil to further generate and deploy knowledge and experience.
