Public access to environmental information (repeal. Directive 90/313/EEC)

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After hard negotiations, the Conciliation Committee finally reached agreement on the directive. The main points of the compromise package may be summarised as follows: - the aim of the directive is to guarantee the right to obtain environmental information from public authorities, to define the basic conditions and implementing arrangements for this right, and to ensure that environmental information is disseminated to the public as widely as possible, particularly by means of information networks and electronic communications; - the definition of "environmental information" shall include reports on the implementation of environmental legislation and information on the state of human health and safety, including where necessary the contamination of the food chain; - environmental information must be made available to the applicant in the form requested, except where the information is already in a form in which it is easily available to applicants. Officials shall be required to support the public in their attempts to acquire environmental information, lists of public authorities must be publicly accessible and the Member States must define the practical arrangements for ensuring that the right of access to environmental information can be effectively exercised. Public authorities must also provide the public with information, guidelines and advice on exercising their rights. These arrangements must also guarantee that the information progressively becomes available to the public through public telecommunications networks and electronic data media; - public authorities must take into account the public interest served by disclosure when considering whether to refuse a request for environmental information. If the request concerns material in the course of completion, the name of the authority preparing the material and the estimated time needed for completion shall be stated; - the directive incorporates the principle that environmental information should be provided without payment. The use of public registers and lists shall be free of charge. Although public authorities may make a charge for supplying any environmental information, such charge should not exceed "a reasonable amount" and must not exceed the actual costs incurred; - as regards the quality of information, Member States must ensure that information compiled by them or on their behalf is up-to-date, accurate and comparable. Where so requested, public authorities must disclose information on measurement procedures; - the directive will be reviewed and, where necessary, amended six years after its entry into force on the basis of the reports provided by the Member States, taking into account in particular developments in telecommunications and electronic communications.