Thematic strategy on the urban environment

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PURPOSE : to promote a thematic strategy on the urban environment.

CONTEXT : urban areas play an important role in delivering the objectives of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. In urban areas the environmental, economic and social dimensions meet most strongly. Cities are where many environmental problems are concentrated, but they are also the economic drivers, the places where business is done and investments are made. Four out of five European citizens live in urban areas, and their quality of life is directly influenced by the state of the urban environment. A high quality urban environment also contributes to the priority of the renewed Lisbon Strategy to make Europe a more attractive place to work and invest.

CONTENT : the measures offered under this Strategy aim to contribute to a better implementation of existing EU environment policies and legislation at the local level by supporting and encouraging local authorities to adopt a more integrated approach to urban management and by inviting Member States to support this process and exploit the opportunities offered at EU level.

If implemented at all levels, the Strategy will ultimately contribute to improve the quality of the urban environment, making cities more attractive and healthier places to live, work and invest in, and reduce the adverse environmental impact of cities on the wider environment, for instance as regards climate change.

The integrated approach to environmental management at the local level and to transport in particular, based on effective consultation of all stakeholders, is key to successful implementation of environment legislation and to achieve long lasting improvements in environmental quality and performance. There is a need to support local authorities in adopting these management techniques.

In this context, the Commission will :

- provide technical guidance in 2006 on integrated environmental management, drawing on experiences and giving good practice examples. Reference will be made to the most relevant EU environmental legislation e.g. air, noise, water, waste and energy efficiency directives;

- provide technical guidance in 2006 on the main aspects of transport plans based on the recommendations of the 2004 Expert Working Group and give best practice examples;

- offer support for the exchange of good practice and for demonstration projects on urban issues for local and regional authorities through these instruments. Member States, regional and local authorities are encouraged to exploit these opportunities;

- evaluate the pilot (end 2006) and consider whether it can be used as a building block for a “European framework programme for the exchange of experience on urban development” under the proposed Cohesion Policy 2007-2013;

- assess the feasibility of establishing a thematic portal for local authorities;

- use the new LIFE+ Regulation and other instruments to support capacity building for local and regional authorities on urban management issues, and it encourages Member States to initiate such activities;

- encourage Member States to exploit these opportunities to address the problems facing their urban areas and give the National Strategic Reference Frameworks an appropriate urban focus;

- offer support for further urban research and will actively involve local authorities and endeavour to make material developed for them available in many languages to facilitate use at the local level.

The Commission states that this strategy is cross-cutting, covering many environmental media and issues. It will contribute to the implementation of the priorities of the 6th EAP and other environmental policies, including the other Thematic Strategies. Different environment policies (air quality, noise etc) ask that abatement plans be drawn up. By placing these plans in the context of a local integrated framework as proposed in this strategy, synergies between many policy areas can be developed, giving improved results, both for the environment and for the overall quality of life in the urban area.