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Press release

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"Environment Switzerland 2011" report

Switzerland's environmental situation: successes and challenges

Bern/Neuchâtel, 13.07.2011 (FOEN/FSO) – **Much progress was made in the environmental field prior to 2000. Since then there have been some improvements, but the targets have not been reached in core areas such as climate change and biodiversity conservation. Within Switzerland, the pressure on the environment continues to grow, albeit at a somewhat slower pace in some areas in recent years. The effects abroad are becoming increasingly significant as a result of growing material imports. These are the findings of the "Environment Switzerland 2011" report, which was compiled jointly by the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) and the Federal Statistical Office (FSO).**

Numerous advances have been achieved in the environment in recent decades: the emission limits of most air pollutants are being met nowadays and the quality of surface water and groundwater is generally good. Environmental pollution by heavy metals, dioxins, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and persistent organic pollutants (POPs) has declined overall, and the remediation of contaminated sites is progressing. As the report also shows, the greatest progress, such as the decrease in emissions of sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and the decline of phosphorus content in surface water, was achieved before the year 2000. Since then, the situation has not markedly improved in number of areas. For example, emission limits for particulate matter (PM10), ozone (O_3) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) are still exceeded on a regular basis, in some cases markedly. In water bodies, micro-pollutants such as residues of pesticides, medicines and cleaning agents are still being detected.

Climate change and biodiversity remain challenges

Targets have not yet been reached in core areas such as climate change and biodiversity conservation. The commitment undertaken by Switzerland under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 8% on average between 2008 and 2012 compared with 1990 levels has not yet been met. The main cause of greenhouse gas emissions is the burning of fossil fuels. Between 1990 and 2009, the consumption of heating fuels fell by 23%. However, the consumption of motor fuels increased by almost 16% and of natural gas by approximately 68% during the same period.

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In biodiversity conservation, it was not possible to stop the loss of animal and plant species and the decline of their habitats. This is mainly attributable to urban sprawl, the increasing extent of soil sealing and landscape fragmentation, as well as to intensive agriculture. At least three regional nature parks and a nature theme park were opened recently.

Effects abroad

Recent figures show that in some areas environmental pressure is increasing less rapidly than it was a few years ago. This is particularly true of urban sprawl. But the increase in energy consumption and in the amount of municipal waste that is incinerated has also slowed down (this is not the case for the total of municipal waste). However, production and consumption often also have an impact abroad: for example, in the mining of raw materials, the manufacture of products and in transport. This "indirect" or "hidden" pressure on the environment is becoming increasingly significant as a result of growing imports. In recent years, 70% of Swiss material needs were covered from abroad – and the trend is rising.

As was the case for the 2007 and 2009 editions, the **"Environment Switzerland 2011" report** was compiled jointly by the Federal Office for the Environment and the Federal Statistical Office. It provides a systematic overview of the state and development of the environment in Switzerland and demonstrates, in particular, the impact of our lifestyle on the environment. The report also takes stock of the measures already adopted to improve the quality of the environment, identifies areas in which action is currently being taken and compares progress made by Switzerland with that of other European countries.

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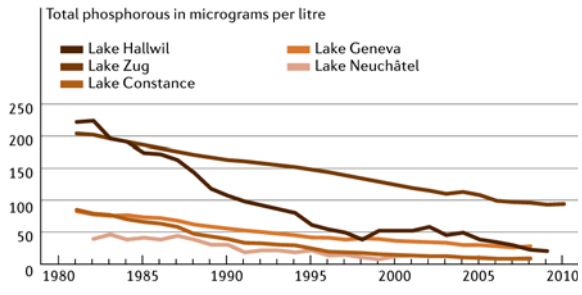
Examples of graphs and maps from "Environment Switzerland 2011"

G1 Phosphorous levels in lake water

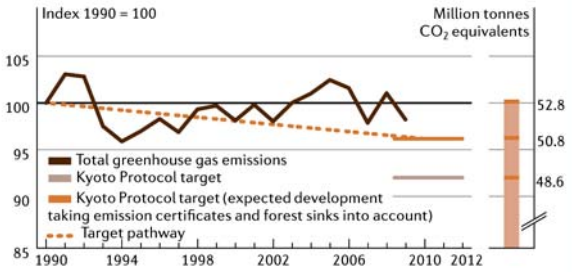


Source: FOEN IF R

Phosphorus is an important nutrient for plants, but elevated input into water bodies can result in nutrient saturation and hence in excess production of plant biomass. The phosphorus content of most Swiss lakes has been declining for some years.

G2 Greenhouse gas emissions

In accordance with the Kyoto Protocol (excluding international aviation and shipping, and land-use changes)

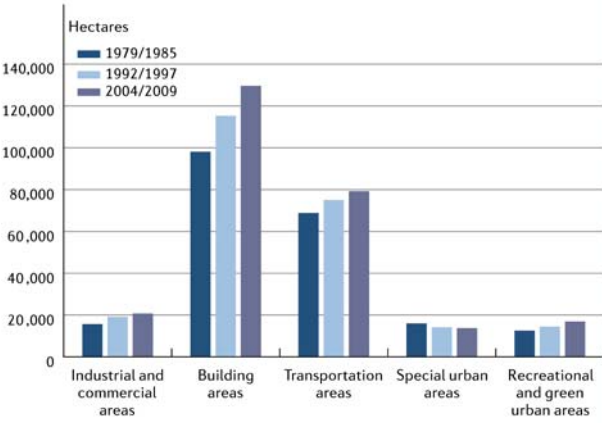


Source: FOEN IF M

Under the Kyoto Protocol, Switzerland undertook to reduce its average greenhouse gas emissions by at least 8% between 2008 and 2012 compared with 1990 levels. The main cause of greenhouse gas emissions is the burning of fossil fuels.

G3 Development of settlement areas over 24 years

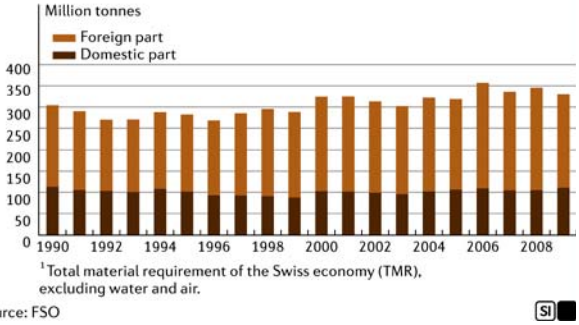
For 63.1 % of total area (West, Central and North Switzerland)



Source: FSO, Land-use statistics SI FS

In the 1980s and 1990s, the area used for settlements and infrastructure increased by approximately 27 km^2 per year. The latest figures for Western, Central and Northern Switzerland also show that the urban sprawl trend continues, albeit with a somewhat reduced momentum.

G4 Resource consumption[1]

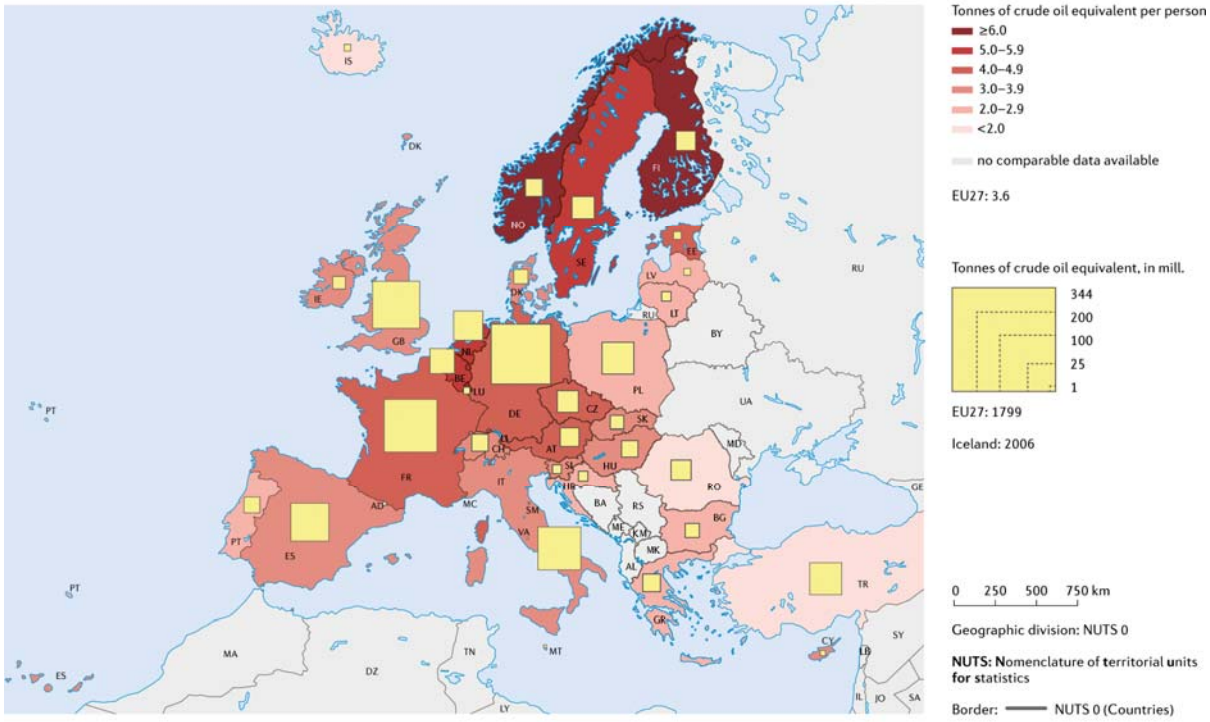


[1] Total material requirement of the Swiss economy (TMR), excluding water and air.

Source: FSO SI

Switzerland's consumption of resources has increased in recent years. While the resources produced domestically have remained approximately constant, material consumption associated with imports in particular has increased. Consequently, environmental pressure from Switzerland is increasingly being brought to bear abroad.

M1 Gross energy consumption, 2008



Source: Eurostat

Map: FSO, ThemaKart