



Creation of an observatory on the performance of public water and water-treatment services

How well do the 30 000 public water and sanitation services in France perform? How much are water consumers billed in each town? What is the quality of the service? Onema is currently setting up a national observatory to evaluate the performance of these services and report to the public and elected officials. It is the result of wide-ranging discussions with all stakeholders in the water field. The observatory will complement the National water information system that Onema is in the process of organising.

● In France today, there are almost 30 000 public water and sanitation services under the direct responsibility of the local authorities. They operate under very different conditions in terms of the local geography, economy and water quality. Their management systems are also highly diverse. Given the complexity of the national situation and lacking the necessary methods and tools, it was difficult until now to rigorously assess the performance of each service.



Performance indicators set after discussions with all stakeholders

● Starting in 2004, the Ecology ministry led efforts to establish common criteria through discussions with local governments, public and private operators, State services and experts. The result of the joint process was a set of some 30 performance indicators for water and sanitation services concerning economic, technical, social and environmental aspects. They will serve to assess performance on an objective basis, acknowledged by all the stakeholders in the sector.

A mission assigned to Onema

● Starting in 2009, local authorities and intercommunal structures will be obliged by law to provide information on each indicator in their annual report on the price and quality of water and sanitation services. The establishment of an observatory for public water and sanitation services in France was assigned to Onema by the law on water and aquatic environments dated 30 December 2006. French society is eagerly waiting for this information if the numerous debates on the price of water over the past few years are any indication.

WATER SERVICES

- Water quality (checks on water quality)
- Correct operation of water networks (management, efficiency, losses, investment)
- Service quality for consumers (interruptions in supply, lead times for connection to the network, complaints)
- Resource protection
- Financial indicators (debt ratios, % consumer unpaid bills, solidarity funds)

COLLECTIVE SANITATION SERVICES

- Operation of sewer systems (asset management, investment, maintenance)
- Conformity and performance of the treatment system (conformity with European urban wastewater treatment directive, discharges to the natural environment, sludge treatment)
- Service quality for consumers (availability of service, complaints)
- Financial indicators (debt ratios, % consumer unpaid bills, solidarity funds)

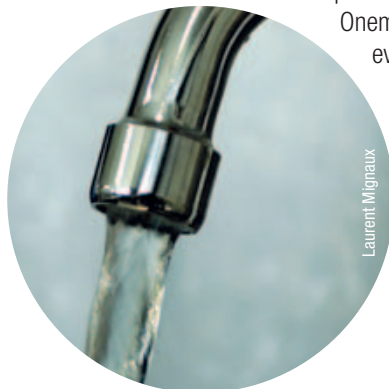
Data freely accessible to everyone

At the end of 2009, the observatory will offer national on-line access to this public information and will propose a breakdown of different types of services to enable relevant comparisons between similar types. Everyone will be able to access this information to understand how the water and sanitation services in their town are organised (local structure, service quality to price ratios) and assess the level of quality with respect to the performance of comparable services. It will thus be possible to go beyond a simple comparison of prices and to apprehend the issues (technical, financial, installations) confronting public services as well as their modifications over time.

A management tool for local governments and water utilities

Local governments and water services will also benefit from the system because it has been designed as a management tool. The ability to compare between equivalent services and to monitor indicators over time will put elected officials and managers in a position to track their performance from year to year, to pinpoint where management efforts are required and to do justice to the increasing complexity of the issues facing their services.

The very size of the system being set up makes it the first of its kind on both the national and European levels. The work launched by Onema takes into account international evaluation methods, in particular through its participation in examining application of the ISO standards to management and evaluation of water and sanitation services.



A PARTNERSHIP WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE WATER FIELD

- **The technical group** comprises the local governments, public and private operators and State services, sets the indicators and ensures the system complies with regulations
- **The steering committee** represents all water stakeholders (i.e. State services, Water agencies, public and private operators, consumer and environmental-protection groups, associations of elected officials) and sets guidelines for the observatory taking into account changes over time and any emerging needs
- **Local authorities and intercommunal structures** provide the information for the performance indicators
- **Onema** collects all the data for the performance indicators
- **The Departmental agriculture and forestry services** assist the local governments by ensuring the consistency of data and they use the data on the local level
- **The Water agencies** use the data on the river-basin level
- **The associations of elected officials** relay the information to the local governments to ensure that it is used to organise and run water services



SCHEDULE

- **March 2009**
- on-line availability of test data from volunteer local governments
- on-line availability of information on water and sanitation services at www.services.eaufrance.fr
- **Second quarter 2009**
local governments enter the data on their services
- **Fourth quarter 2009**
the data on services becomes available on-line to all at services.eaufrance.fr

For more information, contact:

sylvain.rotillon@onema.fr

www.onema.fr

Contact