

The Office of the Auditor General's investigation into the management of hazardous waste

Summary

Background and goal of the investigation

It is the Storting's intention that virtually all hazardous waste shall be properly handled. Norway shall also prevent illegal exports. The Ministry of the Environment has chief responsibility for this. The goal of the investigation was to evaluate the authorities' work on ensuring the proper handling of hazardous waste.

Method

The investigation is based on a review of case files and other documents, interviews, observation, databases and statistics, and a questionnaire survey of households. The investigation is also based on a collaboration with the municipal auditing departments in four municipalities.

Results

The investigation shows that a number of measures have been implemented to ensure the proper handling of hazardous waste. There has been a reduction in hazardous waste whose handling is unknown. This has been a high priority for the Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency in recent years. Special measures such as producer responsibility systems and reimbursement schemes have helped to increase the collection of hazardous waste. Thematic inspection campaigns carried out in cooperation with the offices of the county governors have resulted in more, and more targeted and comprehensive inspections. The Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency has also initiated a review of all permits for treating hazardous waste. However, the investigation shows that many involved parties do not comply with the regulations for the delivery and proper handling of such waste. Major weaknesses have also been found in the Norwegian Maritime Directorate's follow-up and control of the collection of hazardous waste from shipping in Norwegian ports. This increases the risk of discharges of oil and chemicals into the sea.

The investigation shows that a lot of EE waste is not collected. Some of it ends up in residual waste or is exported illegally. This entails a risk that the waste will not be properly handled. Even though the product responsibility agreements work well on the whole, the investigation shows weaknesses in the authorities' follow-up and control. Many of the permits for the receiving and temporary storage of hazardous waste are outdated and the requirements that are set contribute to discrimination. The Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency has given high priority to the supervision of hazardous waste in recent years and strengthened its

cooperation with other agencies.

The prioritisation of inspection objects is not fully risk-based, however. The investigation shows that the county governors and the Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency do little to verify the information provided by the enterprises by taking samples. The inspection reports have failed to clearly communicate which non-conformities are particularly serious. In the investigation, it is pointed out that it is uncertain whether the Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency and the county governors make sufficient use of the sanctions at their disposal in order to ensure better compliance with the regulations. The investigation shows that the Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency only carries out supervisory activities to uncover illegal export of hazardous waste to a very limited extent. Some of the illegal waste export from Norway goes to countries outside the EU/EEA area that do not have the capacity to handle the waste properly. The Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency has entered into a collaboration with the Directorate of Customs and Excise for the control of waste transport, but few inspections have been carried out so far. The Norwegian authorities also lack sanctions against the illegal export of hazardous waste