

Survey of the Authorities' Efforts to Clean up Polluted Soil and Sediments Caused by Polluting Activities in Bygone Years

It will be a big challenge to achieve the goal of cleaning up the most polluted sites by the close of 2005. So far, the environmental protection authorities have been very reserved in their use of the coercive measures specified in the Pollution Control Act to induce delinquent polluters to comply with cleanup orders, but the use of these measures is now being considered.

This is reported in *Document no. 3:6 (2002-2003) The Office of the Auditor General's Survey of the Authorities' Efforts to Clean up Polluted Soil and Sediments Caused by Polluting Activities in Bygone Years*, which was submitted to the Norwegian Storting on 10 January.

A total of 3,390 sites polluted by activities in bygone years have been registered, including a number of landfills and industrial sites. During the period 1991–2000 a total of NOK 289 million was allocated to survey, monitor and clean up pollution. So far, NOK 281 million of these funds have been used. The Office of the Auditor General has reviewed the 151 cases that the authorities have given the highest priority and that represent the most serious sources of pollution. Many of these cases have been closed without implementing sufficient environmental measures. There are still some polluted areas that have not been surveyed, and this is especially true of polluted sediments.

A considerable effort will be necessary in order to complete all of the most serious cases involving land-based pollution by the close of 2005, as targeted. Among other things, the survey shows that there are still some waste disposal sites that are in active use and waste disposal sites that will be monitored for a long time. The survey also shows that only 24 sites have been examined since 1992. This may indicate that it is difficult to find out who is responsible or what must be done.

Necessary to employ Coercive Measures

The environmental authorities think that the most important policy instrument in the effort to clean up polluted soil and sediments is the issuing of orders pursuant to the Pollution Control Act. However, these orders are not always complied with, or it takes a long time before they are complied with. The Office of the Auditor General has noted with satisfaction that the Ministry sees that it may be necessary to employ coercive measures to a greater extent in order to ensure sufficient progress in the cleanup work.

In his reply to the Office of the Auditor General, the Minister of the Environment emphasizes that the efforts to clean up polluted soil and sediments have been given high priority, and he thinks that it is still realistic to expect that the environmental problems at the 100 sites with the highest priority will be solved by the close of 2005.