

Survey of the authorities' control of hazardous chemicals

There is substantial uncertainty linked to the emissions figures of the environmental authorities for chemicals that pose a risk to health and the environment. The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority does not know which hazardous chemicals are being used in the workplace, and the Norwegian Agricultural Inspection Service rarely controls the use of pesticides.

These are the main findings of the Office of the Auditor General's report on the authorities' control of hazardous chemicals (Document no. 3:9 (2001-2002)), which was submitted to the Storting on 28 June. The purpose of the audit was to investigate how the authorities handle the challenges linked to emissions and use of chemicals that pose a risk to health and the environment.

With regard to the Norwegian Pollution Control Authority, the Office of the Auditor General's investigation revealed that the authority has limited knowledge about important sources of emissions of several high-priority chemicals.

The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority does not have an overview of the use of chemicals that represent a chemical health hazard in the industry. The Ministry of Labour and Government Administration stated that they have initiated an evaluation and improvement project for the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority. The Office of the Auditor General is assuming that the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority will deal with the special challenges entailed by the use of toxic chemicals in the workplace in this work.

In respect of the control of the use of pesticides, the Office of the Auditor General concluded that the agricultural authorities have very limited overview over the actual use of this type of chemicals. The Minister of Agriculture stated that the Ministry will follow up the Office of the Auditor General's results and assessments concerning control of pesticides.

The audit report demonstrated that violations of the regulations that govern the use of hazardous chemicals are seldom reported to the police. The Office of the Auditor General expects the authorities to take breaches of the regulations more seriously in the future. The reporting violations to the police should be used as an instrument to improve the general preventive effect of the regulations. In this context, the Minister of the Environment said that he will make sure that the Norwegian Pollution Control Authority implements a stricter practice of reporting violations to the police in the future.