

The Commission:

1. How does it view the fact that, although it was decided to introduce '112' as a single European emergency phone number (Council Decision 91/396/EEC⁽¹⁾ of 29 July 1991), this basic decision has not yet been implemented?
2. Does it have any plans to change the situation?

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 217, 6.8.1991, p. 31.

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission

(4 June 2002)

In principle, and pursuant to Council Decision No 91/396/EEC of 29 July 1991⁽¹⁾, the single European emergency call number is '112'.

According to this Decision, as indicated in Article 1(2), 'the single European emergency call number shall be introduced in parallel with any other existing national emergency call numbers, where this seems appropriate'.

The '112' number had to be made available by 31 December 1996 at the latest. It is now fully functional in all the Member States. In the case referred to by the Honourable Member, the person calling the '112' number did in fact get through to an agency authorised to deal with emergency calls.

However, the Community legislation imposes no obligations on the '112' telephone operators as to which languages they must use when responding to the calls. In practice, these operators use the official language or languages of their country, plus — in virtually all the Member States — English. Other Member States also permit the use of French, German or other languages.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 217, 6.8.1991.

(2002/C 277 E/189)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1239/02

**by Joan Colom i Naval (PSE), Raimon Obiols i Germà (PSE),
Anna Terrón i Cusí (PSE) and María Sornosa Martínez (PSE) to the Commission**

(30 April 2002)

Subject: Water contaminated with slurry in Catalonia

The government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia has recently acknowledged that over the period 1998-2000 the drinking water provided to inhabitants of 132 Catalan municipalities contained nitrates in excess of legally acceptable levels. The contamination stemmed largely from slurry disposed of by the numerous pig farms in the affected areas.

While Community legislation has set the maximum level of nitrates at 50 milligrams per litre of water, results from recent tests carried out in 48 sampling points reveal that the level of nitrate concentration in drinking water is over 100 milligrams per litre.

The facts were reported in March 2000 in Written Question E-0738/00⁽¹⁾, in which specific reference is made to the serious extent of the failure to implement Directive 91/676/CEE⁽²⁾, especially in the case of areas such as Baix Ter and Osona. The Commission replied in September 2000, referring to the infringement proceedings brought against Spain for its failure to implement the above directive, particularly its failure to designate vulnerable areas and its delay in preparing a code of good practice in agriculture. In its answer, the Commission also referred to the Spanish authorities' commitment to resolve the serious problems of water contamination, which had already been reported.

However, two years on, the results published by the government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia reveal that the situation is becoming increasingly serious. They demonstrate that the plan referred to in the undertaking given to the Commission by the relevant authorities has not had much impact as regards improving the affected areas and water supplies.

The number of pig farms in areas susceptible to nitrate pollution is shortly expected to rise.

Could the Commission specify what action has been taken as regards the failure to implement Directive 91/676/CEE in the Catalonian municipalities?

What new measures will the Commission put in place in order to curb the deterioration of water supplies, which poses a serious health risk to the Catalan population?

(¹) OJ C 53 E, 20.2.2001, p. 21.

(²) OJ L 375, 31.12.1991, p. 1.

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(27 June 2002)

With regard to Council Directive 91/676/EEC of 12 December 1991 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources(¹), the Commission instituted two infringement procedures against Spain in which it brought proceedings before the Court of Justice.

Firstly, Spain was censured by the Court of Justice in its judgment of 1 October 1998 in Case C-71/97 for failing to comply with the provisions of Directive 91/676/EEC. The Court noted that Spain had failed to designate vulnerable areas and adopt codes of good practice in agriculture required by Articles 3 and 4 of the Directive. Following the judgment, Spain supplied information on the designation of vulnerable areas throughout its territory and codes of good practice in agriculture.

Secondly, the Court of Justice also censured Spain in its judgment of 13 April 2000 in Case C-274/98 for failing to transmit action programmes for vulnerable areas required under Article 5 of Directive 91/676/EEC. When the Spanish authorities subsequently transmitted various action programmes of the autonomous communities concerned, the Commission decided to halt the infringement proceedings.

The Commission is studying the information provided by the Spanish authorities on the designation of vulnerable areas and the action programmes.

With regard to the specific cases in Catalonia referred to by the Honourable Members in their Written Question, it should be noted that the Commission has initiated infringement proceedings against Spain after a petition had been lodged with Parliament's Committee on Petitions concerning nitrate pollution of drinking water in the Osona district.

Moreover, as the Honourable Members have observed, the Commission has been aware of pollution of the Baix Ter aquifer caused by liquid manure since Mr Colom i Naval's Written Question E-0738/00 (²). Aware that this is not only an environmental but also a human health problem, the Commission has instituted infringement proceedings against Spain which are now in the reasoned opinion stage, the last phase before referring the case to the Court of Justice.

The Commission hopes that these proceedings can contribute to solving the problem highlighted by the Honourable Members.

(¹) OJ L 375, 31.12.1991.

(²) OJ C 53 E, 20.2.2001.