

Press Release:
Dutch and German stakeholders and project partners developing innovations for reducing pharmaceuticals and multi-resistant bacteria in the environment meet
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The complex and increasingly debated issue of contamination in the environment by pharmaceuticals and multi-resistant bacteria is the subject of a transboundary innovation project in the Vechte River watershed in Germany and the Netherlands. The MEDUWA-Vecht(e) project (MEDicine Unwanted in WAter) is a consortium of 27 Dutch and German companies, universities, hospitals, and governmental and non-governmental organizations developing a set of complementary techniques and methods to address this issue.

The contamination of soil and water by medicine and multi-resistant bacteria is a universal problem that has many different sources and society is exposed to this contamination in many different ways. Therefore, solutions directed at the entire lifecycle of these substances are needed.

On Tuesday this week, the MEDUWA Vecht(e) project brought, for the first time, Dutch and German stakeholders from local and regional government agencies and NGOs concerned with human and environmental health together with project partners. The meeting that took place in Osnabrück was hosted by the lead organization of this innovation project, Osnabrück University.

The meeting was opened by Bianca Müllmann, MEDUWA project manager, and Dorothea Altenhofen of the Lower Saxony Water Management, Coastal Defence and Nature Conservation. In her capacity as Operations Manager of the NLWKN office in Meppen concerned with cross-boundary environmental issues, Ms. Altenhofen stressed the important role that she and the other stakeholders have in providing advice, data, and contacts for the project as well as identifying marketing possibilities.

The three-year project, financed by EU INTERREG Deutschland-Nederland Programme, is developing innovative approaches to reducing emissions of human and veterinary pharmaceuticals and multi-resistant bacteria. At the same time, these innovations, once on the market, will support the regional economy. The solutions under development focus on the full lifecycle of pharmaceuticals from source to sink. Examples of the innovations include monitoring systems for water and animals, filtration and oxidation technologies, antibiotics replacements from plant sources, medicines derived from plant and animal enzymes, and an online tool for visualising changes in the watershed.

The visualisation tool, known as the Watershed Information System (WIS), will be openly accessible and will allow users to identify hotspots in the river with the support of the Geo-referenced Regional Environmental Assessment Tool for European Rivers (GREAT-ER) model. Users can also compare the spread of substances resulting from various measures under different hydrological or climatic conditions. Another tool within the WIS, the grey water footprint, will make it possible to calculate and compare the contamination of water stemming from major sources such as hospitals, homes, farms and individual farm products like meat and dairy.

The project, which ends in 2020, operates as a type of incubator for the companies and organisations developing these products and approaches. It thus provides them with a head start in developing and launching their products on the market. With the support of the EU and the research institutes involved, it is possible to make some ground-breaking progress in tackling this complex challenge. The project also serves to demonstrate that the reduction of contamination is only possible through close collaboration among different sectors of society.

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