



Enterprises Reduce Pollution and Save Money

Challenge

In January 2000, a major cyanide spill in the heart of Romania's mining region flooded the Danube River with toxic waste from a gold smelting operation near the city of Baia Mare. The contamination killed fish and polluted drinking water in Romania, Hungary, Serbia, and Bulgaria before dissipating in the Black Sea.



Photo: Avrom Bendavid-Va

Project personnel survey pollution at pigments factory in Oradea.

“This is really about reducing water pollution, but the only way to do that is to offer solutions to private companies that save them money. There is a strong incentive for them to meet EU standards and to sell their products to European markets.”

- Avrom Bendavid-Val, project manager

Results

USAID involved local inspectors to educate enterprises about environmental management systems and pollution prevention, and to develop a collaborative, problem-solving relationship with the enterprises they inspect. The combined savings in production costs for the five plants amounted to more than \$275,000 annually, and pollution discharges were significantly reduced. The pollution prevention measures have reduced their water use by two million cubic meters annually and energy use by 140 megawatts annually.

Initiative

To reduce the chances of similar disasters, and to help Romania meet its environmental goals for European Union (EU) membership, USAID helped the Romanian government show local enterprises how to reduce pollution at the source, prevent spills, and improve competitiveness and sustainability.

As a pilot project, five enterprises in two cities - Cluj-Napoca in central Romania and Oradea in the northwest - began pollution prevention measures to improve efficiency, minimize waste, and reduce energy use – all of which lowers production costs and benefits a company's bottom line. All five were heavy water polluters - far out of compliance with regulatory water standards.

All five partners undertook at least one significant pollution prevention measure, established an initial environmental management system in the most heavily polluting parts of their operations, and extended the systems to other parts of their plants. Four invested their own funds in prevention measures ranging from \$16,000 to \$230,000. All five designed or upgraded their emergency preparedness and response plans for accidental spills.

