

# Israel joins UN protocol on air pollution

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## **Israel commits to granting public access to transparent emissions data in acceding to protocol on air pollution release, monitoring.**

In a commitment to grant the public access to transparent emissions data, Israel acceded this week to a UN protocol on air pollution release and monitoring.

The Kiev Protocol – also known as the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR) – was first adopted at the Aarhus Convention on May 21, 2003, within the framework of the fifth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in Kiev. The protocol aims “to enhance public access to information through the establishment of coherent, nationwide pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs),” and is the first such legally binding international tool to take on this goal, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

By requiring transparency, instead of regulating emissions output, the protocol’s effectiveness hinges on the idea that companies will want to avoid the stigma of being large polluters.

“The secretary-general appreciates all ratifications and accessions to the treaties deposited with him, including the Kiev Protocol,” UN spokesman Farhan Haq said, confirming to The Jerusalem Post Israel’s accession and adding that the protocol will enter into force for Israel on April 14.

“In order to manage something you need to be able to measure it. Otherwise you can’t tell if our actions are making the situation better or worse,” said Steve Cohen, executive director of The Earth Institute at Columbia University. “The Kiev protocol is an important step to creating a world community of environmental data. Israel’s acceptance of the protocol reaffirms its place in that world community. It is a small but significant step.”

As of December 31, 2003, 36 countries, in addition to the European Union as a whole, had individually signed the protocol: Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro (now separate nations), Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Macedonia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

Israel is the second country in the Middle East, after Cyprus, to join the protocol.

Although the signature period for the protocol ended on that day, the protocol became open for accession by UN member states and regional economic associations on

January 1, 2004, the UNECE said. The protocol first became internationally legally binding as of October 8, 2009.

While most of the original signatories have ratified or at least approved, accepted or acceded to the protocol, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine have yet to do any of the above. In addition, two countries that were not original signatories of the protocol have since acceded to it: Albania in June 2009 and Slovakia in April 2008.

Following Israel's decision to accede to the Kiev Protocol this week, the protocol becomes legally binding to the country 90 days from the date of accession – January 14, Environmental Protection Ministry officials, told the Post on Wednesday.

The primary reason that Israel was a relative latecomer to PRTR accession is that it first needed to enact domestic legislation that would match the standards of the protocol.

While Environmental Protection Ministry staff had intended to advance such legislation independently as well, a push from the OECD after Israel became a member helped speed along the process, the officials said.

Israel became an OECD member in June 2010, and by August 2010 had prepared a draft version of the country's PRTR policy.

OECD and UNECE leaders were impressed at the speed in which Israel was able to launch its own legislation and then accede to the international protocol, officials said.

Israel's internal PRTR legislation was enacted on April 1, 2012, and by June 30, the Environmental Protection Ministry had received emissions data from factories all over the country. Over the next few months, ministry staff verified the information, and by December 1, the data for approximately 700 facilities became available online.

Members of the public, factory operators and regulators will all benefit from Israel's PRTR, as it constitutes the first time a comprehensive emissions transfer database is available to all based on a structured methodology, the officials said. The database will act as a motivator for emission reduction, and provide the factories with the opportunity to prove the positive influence that their emission prevention and reduction techniques have had.

As part of Israel's overall Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) programs, the European Union has decided to involve the country in its twinning program, in which EU members states partner with southern and eastern Mediterranean countries on specific projects, ministry officials explained. In a few months, a representative from a German firm will come to Israel as part of this program to work with Environmental Protection Ministry staff on both IPPC and PRTR. While EU twinning has occurred in other Israeli ministries, this is the first such program to occur in the Environmental Protection Ministry, officials said.

A spokeswoman from UNECE told the Post that the organization had received notification from the Israeli government on Tuesday of the country's accession. The

UNECE is waiting, however, to issue a formal release of the information in accordance with UN procedures, through its Treaty Section website, the spokeswoman said.

The leaders of environmental advocacy group Adam Teva V'Din (Israel Union for Environmental Defense) expressed their satisfaction with Israel's decision to accede to the PRTR protocol.

“Adam Teva V'Din is very proud and happy to learn that Israel has acceded to the Kiev protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Register, a law that was first drafted and promoted by Adam Teva V'Din,” Amit Bracha, the organization's executive director, told the Post. “The new law will assure transparency in environmental information, will encourage industry to reduce emissions and will help decision-makers plan a more sustainable environment for us and for the next generations.”