

A long tradition

100 years of industrial environmental protection at Bayer

The history of environmental protection at Bayer dates back to November 5, 1901. That was the date on which the four members of the newly founded Wastewater Commission at Bayer's Leverkusen site first convened. Their task was to collect information on the wastewater produced at the factory and on the amount of pollution the river Rhine could cope with. It was an important milestone, as it showed that those in charge at the time were seriously concerned about the environmental impact resulting from the boom in production. By the end of the 19th century, the impact of rapid industrialization was already being felt, and streams and small rivers could no longer cope with the amount of effluent being discharged. This led Bayer to transfer its larger production plants from the original site in the narrow valley of the river Wupper to the Rhine, where there was considerably more space and also better transport connections – including the Rhine itself as a shipping route. It was also originally thought that the Rhine could provide an easy answer to the company's wastewater problems. However, it soon became

clear that even Germany's largest river, with its considerable volume of water, had limited self-cleaning capacity, especially as there were other major chemical companies upstream, which also discharged wastewater into the river.

Initially conceived as a monitoring body, the Wastewater Commission was soon faced with an increasing number of tasks. Even the earliest records show that it was not only concerned with determining the type, amount and origin of the constituents in Bayer's wastewater, but also looked for ways of improving the situation, passing on its findings to the plants in the form of recommendations or instructions. Soon the Wastewater Commission was also dealing with other aspects of environmental protection, for example waste air. After only a few years it became obvious that specialization was necessary. Thus the Committee for the Maintenance of Clean Air was set up on July 18, 1913. In Section 4 of its manifesto, the Committee's objectives are described as follows: "The purpose of the Committee is to combat the problem of pollution of factory air both

by harmful or foul-smelling gases and vapors and by soot and dust."

Since these first steps, environmental protection – a term which was not introduced until the 60s – has gradually taken on a new dimension. The development of disposal methods brought tangible and sustainable improvements to the environmental impact of chemical production. The success achieved also clearly showed that it is much better to integrate environmental protection into process routines rather than at the end of the production process. This led to the development of today's in-process and product-integrated environmental protection.

Responsible Care and sustainable development sound today's call to action. Bayer was and is involved in numerous developments, as the following examples show.

Some milestones in environmental protection (from left): the Dormagen production site, which was certified following an eco-audit; Tower Biology in Leverkusen; the air monitoring vehicle – yesterday and today

