



Press release

2013 flood crisis – the images are so similar – but what have we learned since 1954 and after ten other major floods in the meantime?

Nothing! Or so it would seem.

When the town of Grimma in Saxony was destroyed by floods in 2002, and many houses had to be torn down or extensively repaired, the general public believed the politicians and town planners when they said that a similar event could never happen again.

Ten years on, and Grimma is drowning once again.

Despite all the talk and several million wasted euros, it doesn't appear that anyone has actually been *doing* anything in the ensuing period to stop this kind of event from occurring again.

The reality is shocking: Dresden also found itself under water in 2002. Yet it was only in 2008 – six years later – that the first city gate was equipped with **flood-prevention technology**. Please note – it was only a gate. Yet Dresden was fortunate, and the following floods were relatively harmless.

But what about Grimma? The planned flood protection is still not finished, and there is no end of people guilty of slowing progress to be able to hold them accountable.

And there are many other towns throughout Europe which are just like Grimma.

Then, all of a sudden, another major flood appears out of the blue. The intervening years witnessed a lot of talking, missed opportunities and even prevented action from being taken. And now we are once again surrounded by millions of futile sandbags, talking of fast aid unhindered by red tape. But, as soon as the cellars are dry again, everyone starts to forget. Even the victims. Until the next surprise comes along.

The bureaucratic barriers are too high all over the EU, and at their worst in the countries currently hit once again by the most recent floods: Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic. Switzerland, a small country also affected, should be an example to us all.

The more pointedly politicians speak of aid and regret, the easier they find it to get re-elected, yet the same factors remain ready to hinder them in the manifestation of their promises. It's easy to push such decisions further down the to-do list – all the way until retirement – especially if you are keeping one eye on promotion.

Wherever you look, there are merely acts of tokenism using **sandbags**, which we all know cost a lot and help only a little. From their manufacturing to filling, transport and disposal as contaminated waste, they cost €12 per bag, not to mention the manpower required – tens of thousands of paid and voluntary workers.

A little knowledge of maths will show what level of **mobile flood-prevention technology** could have been installed with some conscientious forward planning.

The TV channels show an army of helpless reporters pointing at water and sandbags and playing down the

responsibility of those who could have avoided the latest damage.

It is not possible to prevent **floods** from taking place, and there will always be extreme floods, where standard, affordable flood-prevention technology offers no protection or a very limited amount. But these are still the exception.

It is, however, possible to protect people from the effects of a normal flood by means of **prevention**. The kind of flood often referred to as 'the flood of the century' is now hitting on an almost yearly basis. We cannot wait three to ten years for **the planning of mobile and stationary flood-prevention technology** – this has got to change. Independent professionals must be called in. The human and animal suffering caused and the deaths mourned should motivate us to look at these failures in a new light. The number of failures in remedying the damage – a harmless term which conceals guilt – should no longer be kept quiet. After all, payments of €52 billion were made in the last ten years in Europe alone.

There is never enough money in the budget for flood prevention, except for the billions spent on prestige projects. Yet when it's too late for prevention, we find the money for the cure. Only it's not a lasting cure. The next flood will come just as certainly as the next election . . .

Investing only a projected 20% of this sum into flood-prevention technology could have prevented the worst and would have continued to do so for decades.

We would like to offer politicians, officials, planners and private households wishing to take preventive action for the future our helping hand and expertise. Let's work together for a better future. All members of our association are ready and willing to be of assistance with expert advice – we are the flood-prevention professionals. We know that modern technology is capable of protecting flood-prone areas with absolute certainty. And **dykes** no longer have to be saturated and collapse thanks to readily available, state-of-the-art stabilisation techniques.

Everything undertaken to date needs to be reviewed.

Global warming and the storms and regional catastrophes it causes mean that we need to change the way we think about a whole range of topics. As we watch nature's balance descend into disarray, scientists are considering how to manage climate change in the future – how people, cultures and societies are to conquer the technological and cultural challenges before them.

Of course, there is always more than one way to look at things, but should we not make the effort to save everything we are able to save? **Prevention** against the seemingly inevitable?

It's not all about taking a huge leap, small steps are what are needed, provided that they are heading in the right direction. The people putting the brakes on are powerful. We cannot wait for them to die out: we need to take action now. Prevention saves lives.

Christian H. Wirz - Chairman –

European Flood Protection Association
e.V.

Tel.: +49 (0)89 4161 9153

Fax: +49 (0)89 4161 9154

Email: info@europaverband-

hochwasserschutz.eu

Website: www.Europaverband-Hochwasserschutz.eu