

## **After 70 years of RIWA, protecting the Rhine and Meuse remains essential**

On 15 June 2021, the RIWA Association of River Water Companies will reach its 70th anniversary. On that date in 1951 the directors of "four large river water companies in the Netherlands" met for the first time. The aim was "to study together the problem of the pollution of the Rhine and to advise the Government as one in its further steps to counteract this mishap as far as possible". This 70th anniversary of the protection of the Rhine, and later the Meuse and the Scheldt, as sources for the production of drinking water is perhaps not something to celebrate but it is a message to contemplate: Pollutants that threaten the sources for the production of drinking water must be tackled at the source and internationally.

### [New challenges continue to present themselves](#)

The water quality of the large rivers has improved in recent decades. The RIWA Association of River Water Companies, which was founded seventy years ago, has made an important contribution to the fight for clean rivers. Over 40 per cent of Dutch drinking water is produced from the water of the Rhine and Meuse rivers. In Flanders, about half of the drinking water is produced from river water. The Water Framework Directive should have been the crowning glory of the improvement in water quality, but meeting those targets is under great pressure. Moreover, new substances continue to end up in the rivers, which prove difficult to remove in the preparation of drinking water.

### [National and international cooperation](#)

Whereas RIWA first concentrated on extensive measurement and analysis work, it soon developed into an effective interest organisation for the river water companies, both nationally and internationally. That has always been and remains the strength of the association: linking solid measurement data to research and awareness. From the phenol and pesticides of the fifties and sixties to the drug residues and persistent, mobile and toxic substances (PMT substances) and harmful PFAS today. As the founding meeting shows, the first approach was to advise the Dutch government on taking a position in international discussions. Since then, RIWA itself has been an active participant in the various consultative forums of the international river commissions. Over time, the partnership of four Dutch drinking water companies has expanded to include six companies along the Maas and Scheldt rivers, around 120 along the Rhine and around 170 throughout Europe.

### [Starting at the source](#)

RIWA focuses strongly on combating contamination at the source, by identifying it and by making contact with governments and producers to clean up these discharges. By gaining access to and participation in the permit applications, discharges of pollutants can be reduced and prevented. Together with river water companies in other European river basins, RIWA has developed a strategy and vision for the preparation of drinking water from surface water according to the principles of sustainability, precaution and prevention: the European River Memorandum. From river water that meets these water quality requirements, the Maas and Rhine water companies can prepare drinking water in a sustainable way, using natural purification methods.

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**Note to the editor (not for publication)**

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