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Minister for Sustainable Development Mona Sahlin has declared that Sweden is going to become the first country in the world to break the dependence on fossil energy. Sweden will stop using oil by 2020 and eventually the energy supply of the country will be based on renewable energy only. The goal is to gradually rid the country of gasoline-run cars and oil-heated homes.

This is going to be achieved through tax discounts, more efficiency in energy and by large-scale investments in renewable energy and in research. Already next year there will be tax incentives for single family homeowners to switch from oil to renewable energy to heat their homes. Such financial incentives are already available to libraries, aquatic facilities and hospitals that want to switch to more efficient renewable energy. The expansion of distant heating continues to be an important tool in this process.

The Swedish government also wants to make environmental cars more affordable. One of the ways it is doing this is by not subjecting fuel that is free of carbon dioxide to the energy tax or to the carbon dioxide emission tax. Environmental cars will also not have to pay the congestion tax that will be introduced in Stockholm in January and many municipalities allow free parking for such cars.

Swedish industry and the economy as a whole are already benefiting from a lower dependency on oil in an international comparison. Since 1994 the use of oil in residences and in the service sector has dropped by 15.2 TWH. The consumption of oil in industries has remained at the same level since that year, even though industrial production has increased by 70 percent. A growing number of households make use of the advantages of distant heating as well as of pellets.

Minister Sahlin's latest statement on the abolition of oil in 2020 is actually just a confirmation of a goal set a long time ago. Sweden has been a pioneer in the environmental field and has introduced many innovative measures through the years to



SWEDEN PLANS ON BEING THE FIRST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD TO BE FREE FROM OIL IN 2020

achieve its goals.

Already in 1990 Swedes implemented a "green tax shift". Taxes on energy and on carbon dioxide emissions were raised, while other taxes, such as those on payroll were decreased by an equivalent amount.

Sweden also invested heavily in its cities and towns. Municipalities receive grants to conduct long-term climate research and make investments in environment-friendly technology. Not only has this helped cut local pollution, it has also raised the level of public awareness of environmental issues.

In 1999 a unanimous national goal was established for all the country's major environmental problems to be solved within one generation, by the year 2020. The Swedish Parliament gave unanimous approval to 15 national targets including a phasing out of all use of hazardous chemicals by 2020; ensuring that all lakes and watercourses are ecologically sustainable, their habitats and ecological and water-conserving function

The eternally optimistic Minister for Sustainable Development Mona Sahlin on a chilly Stockholm street (above), wants to rid Sweden of its oil dependency

preserved; providing a safe and sustainable supply of drinking water and contributing to viable habitats for flora and fauna; protection of the value of forests for biological production, while biological diversity, cultural heritage and recreational assets are safeguarded, and a healthy living environment to be provided by cities and towns where buildings and amenities must be located and designed with sound environmental principles.

There are interim objectives for each target, regional and local objectives to match, and an Environmental Objectives Council to monitor progress towards the goals. Progress is charted through 70 national indicators, which track results and verify whether the country is heading in the right direction.