

Cement plants are among the largest emitters of carbon dioxide (CO₂). However, neither of the two measuring stations of the Environmental Protection Agency, both about a kilometer from the Lafarge cement factory, measures CO₂. It is a gas that pollutes the atmosphere and causes climate change. According to the World Health Organization, CO₂ has been retained in the atmosphere for more than a century and has long-term effects of global warming. These cells therefore measure air pollution by PM particles, which can cause respiratory and cardiovascular diseases in humans. They are especially dangerous for vulnerable groups – the elderly, children, and those with pre-existing heart or lung diseases. Among factories and thermal power plants, Lafarge took 14th place in Serbia in 2019 after the emission of these particles.

According to the analysis of CINS, in Beocin, the concentration of PM₁₀ particles that year was higher than the allowed 51 days, and in 2020 48.

In addition, Lafarge pollutes with sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x / NO₂), so in 2019 it was ranked 6th in Serbia in terms of nitrogen oxide emissions, and 13th in terms of sulfur oxides. CO₂ and nitrogen oxides lead to acid rain, which destroys forests, adversely affects flora and fauna, and accelerates the corrosion of materials. Exposure to high concentrations of SO₂ can also cause respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, while nitrogen oxides cause dizziness in the short term, and increase the risk of premature death in the long run. Nitrogen oxides damage water and water.

In a statement for CINS from Lafarge, on the other hand, they say that the air quality in Beocin is the worst in the winter when the factory is not working. They add that they are not responsible for the implementation of the planned measures on public areas, but that it is the competence of the municipality. Lafarge recently announced that by replacing the electrostatic filter with a more modern bag filter, it will solve the problem of dust in Beocin. However, in response to CINS, the cement plant confirmed that this would not reduce the level of other pollutants:

The inspection also pointed to poor handling of hazardous waste

Although the use of municipal waste as an alternative fuel is prohibited in the Titan cement plant in Kosjerić, Lafarge has this permit.

As Bratimir Nešić, an environmental protection engineer, told CINS, only cement plants in Beočin and Popovac near Paraćin have permits for waste incineration for energy use. He adds that “municipal waste instead of incineration can certainly be treated differently”, for example by reuse or recycling. Also, Lafarge uses petroleum coke, a fuel obtained as a by-product in oil refineries, while, according to media reports, in the Slovenian cement plant of

this company in 2017, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Spatial Planning of Slovenia did not issue that permit. During the 2019 control, the Provincial Secretariat for Urbanism and Environmental Protection determined that Lafarge received and used 963 tons of hazardous waste as an alternative fuel, without prior control, ie without a report on waste testing, thus violating the integrated permit necessary for work. In addition, it happened that hazardous waste was incinerated with incomplete reports, which is not in accordance with the Rulebook on categories, testing and classification of waste, as well as with the integrated permit.

According to two laws and one decree, the cement plant had to control the documentation on the movement of waste when taking over the hazardous waste. The inspection report shows that in November 2019, it did not do that.

The inspection also determined that Lafarge took over rubber granulate from certain companies, which was created in the process of recycling tires, as a finished product, ie without a document on the movement of waste. This rubber granulate was used by the factory as an alternative fuel in the cement production process, which is contrary to the integrated permit. The provincial inspection has found leaks in the cement plant before. In 2016, the factory did not keep all the legally prescribed documentation for the rubber granulate, which it burned and stored in a place that was not provided for that.

Cooperation with local authorities

The Spasimo Beocin Association says that they are not satisfied with how the competent state institutions and the Municipality react to their reports, complaints and proposals. They believe that the fact that the Municipality of Beocin does not have an inspector for environmental protection best reflects the attitude of official bodies towards this problem. As they told us, the Association has not been officially registered to date in order to protect itself from the possible consequences of its engagement in Beocin.

FakeNews tracker journalist Stefan Kosanovic explained why those working in the factory are not fighting to solve the problem:

“Workers’ work is very hard. I think the big problem is their media literacy, the fact that they follow in the media imposes a lot more things to worry about than those particles that if it didn’t exist, they wouldn’t have a job. If we don’t pollute then we don’t work, then we don’t have a salary. (...) The information about the air we always breathe is negligible, especially for someone who is the second third generation here and who remembers that dust. ”

On the other hand, the factory’s cooperation with the local government is reflected in

numerous donations to the municipality. Cementara announced that, from the privatization in 2002 to 2011, it had invested 3.5 million euros through the Fund for the Realization of the Social Program. The agreement on cooperation that the Municipality signed with the factory in 2011 announced a five-year investment of 2,050,000 euros for the improvement of living conditions, the development of the local community and a more favorable climate for attracting investors. At the end of 2017, the factory promised another 200,000 euros for the same purpose. Lafarge helped Beocin through the construction of a sports center, town square, religious buildings, the Beocin Business Park business zone within the factory complex, the reconstruction of schools and a children's playground. In addition, as they stated in their response to CINS, they participated in the procurement of medical equipment for the Health Center in Beocin.

When asked whether the inspection controlled this factory in the last four years, we received an answer from the Municipality that there was no need for that. It is clear from the answer that the Municipality does not have an inspection for environmental protection. We did not receive an answer to the other questions.

The president of the municipality, Mirjana Malešević Milkić, did not respond to the invitations and messages either, as it is written on the website of the municipality that she worked in the cement plant from 1997 to 2017, mostly in managerial and director positions. "It is not a problem in the current government, nor in the former government, nor in those before them. It is not in the interest of the local self-government to deal seriously with this problem because they would directly lose funds. But that is not a problem of local self-government as much as we are citizens ", says student Dušan Andrić for CINS.

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