

Serbia closed its huge Vinca landfill, almost three weeks after acrid smoke engulfed the capital Belgrade following a fire at the site, the Tanjug news agency reported on Thursday, citing Irena Vujkovic, country's minister for environmental protection.

The four-decade old Vinca site is the largest unmanaged landfill site in Europe, according to the International Finance Corporation, and is located around 17 kilometers (10.5 miles) from downtown Belgrade near the Danube river.

Its daily intake is more than 1,500 tonnes of household waste and around 3,000 tonnes of construction waste. Due to decomposition and poor waste treatment, fires emitting dense smoke from the site are frequent.

According to the report, Vujovic said that the now-closed landfill would be stabilised from sliding and recultivated by 2023.

"We had a fire, ... due to 40 years of depositing of waste in a manner not prescribed (by regulations) ... I am hoping it will never happen again", the Tanjug quoted Vujovic as saying. According to data from Belgrade's health authorities, the Vinca landfill has so far released over 4 billion cubic meters of methane into the atmosphere.

In recent years, Serbia's environmental organisations have staged protests to demand closure of the landfill.

Belgrade authorities and the French-Japanese consortium Suez-Itochu in 2019 began construction of a new landfill site, incinerator and a waste-to-energy plant.

Serbia is a candidate for membership of European Union, but before it can join, it needs to invest more than 15 billion euros to comply with the bloc's environmental standards, including those concerning solid and liquid waste treatment.

Source: whbl.com