

The major problem of toxic waste in Serbia is gradually eliminating controls. The state has two years to solve the problem it has been burying for decades, but no attention has yet been paid to the funds for adequate disposal of hazardous chemicals that are gradually entering the environment of the poisonous population.

In Serbia, in recent months, several sites have been discovered with illegally deposited hazardous industrial waste. An oil cake pit was discovered in Apatin, while an underground landfill with 1500 tons of hazardous waste was found in Novi Sad, near the former chemical industry. Also, this month around 100 tons of irregularly disposed hazardous waste were observed in the vicinity of Pančevo. The event that activated this series is the case from Obrenovac.

At three locations around Obrenovac in December last year, about 25,000 tons of hazardous waste was buried in the ground. Citizens reported to the municipal police at the end of August that in Vukićevica, in the vicinity of Obrenovac, there were suspicious actions, that is, that a certain person buried him in the land of a barrel with an unknown substance. More than three months have passed since the announcement of the citizens until the communal police went to the field, and in the meantime, the Security Information Agency was involved in the investigation. After digging the barrels and sending the substance to the analysis, it was found that they contained derivatives of benzene and benzol. It's about carcinogens substances that are dangerous to people's lives and the environment. It was not established how long the barrels of dangerous substances were buried in the ground.

What actually triggered an alert to the local population is that the plot at which the hazardous waste was found is located near the artesian wells connected to the Obrenovac waterworks. Namely, it was discovered that the content of a number of barrels was leaked into the ground. Since such chemical substances are capillary spreading over the earth, there was a risk that dangerous substances would penetrate the groundwater and cause a real disaster. The Obrenovac Public Health Institute conducted a water analysis at the beginning of January and said dangerous substances were not found in water from local wells. However, it is still not known whether the particles of hazardous waste have really penetrated the groundwater. Further testing in the next period will only determine whether the water has actually been polluted, or because it is unknown how much matter has leaked into the ground, there is still a risk that dangerous substances will penetrate the groundwater. In the meantime, residents were warned not to drink water from the water supply. Otherwise, due to outdated infrastructure and chemical-bacterial water malfunctioning, residents of Obrenovac have been unable to use water from local wells for 10 years, but they are used for other household use.

Outsourcing the problem

However, the case from Obrenovac drew attention to a completely different problem, which is an improper disposal and disposal of hazardous waste and the consequences of such cases. However, many cases of improper disposal of hazardous waste have raised media dusts and alarmed the concerned public, these problems do not exist from yesterday. Disposal of hazardous waste is a problem that, in Serbia, has long been pushed under the carpet.

Serbia annually generates about 80,000 tons of hazardous waste. However, there is no facility for the disposal and processing of hazardous waste in the country, or an adequate system solution for hazardous waste. Therefore, most hazardous wastes are exported to EU countries. The cost of processing tonnes of hazardous waste is from 1000 to 3000 Euros, depending on the type of waste. However, the disposal of hazardous waste by export is about to come to an end. Namely, after 2020, the export of hazardous waste to the EU country will be disabled. The issue of building a physical-chemical waste treatment plant started in 2001, but no government has found an adequate solution, largely leaving the problem of the next post. The solution in terms of plant construction was circumvented by outsourcing – the state left the disposal and disposal of hazardous waste to private companies.

According to the Ministry of Environmental Protection, 713 permits were issued to private companies for the management of hazardous waste, but only 30 of them really are engaged in this business. Bad regulations for issuing licenses have led to the fact that the number of companies for the disposal of hazardous waste has increased. The lack of supervision and inspection of factories producing hazardous wastes in practice leads to the engagement of private companies without professional capacities that take over hazardous waste disposal operations with less cost than firms that deal with it professionally. The chain continues the lack of control over these companies, which leads to inadequate waste management. The case from Obrenovac is a sample example of precisely such practices and behaviors towards hazardous waste. The enchanted circle closes with the re-announcement of tenders for remediation of the same waste, while the costs of such makinations are paid by citizens.

From amateurs to professionals

Obrenovac is certainly not an isolated case. The last example was recorded in Pančevo. While the Obrenovac case was a classic example of “amateur” disposal of hazardous waste with favorable tariffs managed by a local carrier, this time it is a company that deals professionally with the activity of hazardous waste management. Namely, two weeks ago, at the location of Eko 21 in Pančevo, 100 tons of inadequate collected hazardous waste

originated from Petrohemija Pančevo. It is suspected that hazardous waste is inadequately dispatched to two more locations in Pančevo. When he went to the “crime scene”, Environment Minister Goran Trivan said the ministry would check whether Eko 21 respected the conditions for the registration of a hazardous waste management company. However, in the Law on Waste Management, it is clear that hazardous waste producers are obliged by law to inform the state about the movement of hazardous waste, 48 hours before the waste leaves the factory at all. In so far as the minister’s simulation of ignorance about a pancreatic case is a simple spin.

New Party member Marinka Tepić called Minister Trivana saying she conceals data on hazardous waste, and called on him to publish complete records on the movement of hazardous waste within Serbia. She added that if minister Trivan cannot get information in the case of Pančevo, to address to his wife who is a member of the Supervisory Board of Petrohemija Pančevo. In the light of all scandals related to the invention of hazardous waste in several locations across Serbia, Trivan boldly announced that the crime of improper disposal of hazardous waste was completed, with a comment that all those who deal with this crime will be seized of licenses and severe penalties. The irony lies in the fact that the Ministry of Environmental Protection is in charge of issuing licenses to hazardous waste disposal companies, and thus is directly responsible for this situation in the hazardous waste sector.

In addition to the current wetland of hazardous waste, Serbia has a huge problem dragging from the past. It’s about the so-called historical waste, that is, waste that dates back to the era of socialism and post-socialism, which was generated in the meanwhile of the extinguished factory or those that ended in bankruptcy. It is estimated that in the territory of Serbia there are about 300,000 tons of historical waste that the inspectorate has found in 90 factories. Historical waste is also classified as hazardous waste because it is largely hazardous chemical substances trapped in inadequate conditions within factories. A case in the industrial zone of Šabac is shown on the potential danger of uninhabited historical waste. During the floods of 2014, the threat of 3.5 tons of polychlorinated biphenyls was poured into the Sava River. Polychlorinated biphenyls are highly carcinogenic and mutagenic substances that used to be used for making transformers.

To recall, the cost of disposing tons of hazardous waste amounts to 1000 to 3000 euros. According to this calculation, Serbia must allocate from EUR 300 to 900 million with the remediation of historical waste, which does not include the costs of land remediation, that is, the removal of pollution from the land.

Symptoms of destroyed trust

As part of the opening of chapter 27 within the EU negotiations, State Secretary of the Ministry of Environmental Protection Ivan Karić announced that in 2018 the competent services will fight the most precisely with the problem of historical pollution. She complained that no local self-government had expressed the desire to build a facility for the treatment of hazardous waste in its territory. Since most of the major strategic projects in the country are covered with velvet of transparency with affliction accompanying them in a rate, it is not surprising that local governments are deterring from such facilities in their backyard.

An example of the start of the construction of a factory for treatment of medical waste in Stara Pazova and then its relocation in Ruma shows how the process actually looks in practice. Namely, the domestic company Sinofarm and the Chinese company Gient started building a medical waste treatment plant near the Nestle factory in Stara Pazova in 2016. Although such plants should be located in specially designated zones and far from any food production. Environmental activists have alarmed the local population and the construction work has been interrupted. Shortly thereafter, the facility for treating medical waste in strict confidentiality began to build in Ruma.

With 80,000 tons of generated hazardous waste annually with the existing 300,000 tons of historical waste, the situation in this sector is a timely ecological bomb. When added to the ban on the export of hazardous waste from Serbia to the EU in 2020, the urgency of constructing a treatment plant for hazardous waste cannot be a priority. On the other hand, the lack of transparency of the Ministry regarding the discovery of hazardous waste sites along with the existing porous regulations for issuing licenses leads to danger to the environment and human lives. The situation in the hazardous waste sector only shows the irresponsibility and unwillingness of the authorities to try to find a solution to this toxic problem. After all, 0.25% of the budget allocated from Serbia's environmental budget for Serbia is quite enough to indicate how much the current government is doing for the environment, and therefore for the health and quality of life of people.