

- Industrial legacy has left behind carcinogens such as chromium and cobalt
- Project to monitor soil pollution identifies 14 priority industrial sites for remediation
- First-ever nationwide effort to improve sustainable land management in the Republic of Serbia

Fourteen former industrial sites have been shortlisted for remediation under the first-ever nationwide effort to improve land management in the Republic of Serbia.

Decades of industrial activity and improper waste disposal infrastructure have left a hazardous legacy of contaminated soils in the country. Hundreds of sites have been polluted by heavy metals and potential carcinogens such as zinc, copper, lead and mercury, as well as confirmed carcinogens such as chromium or cadmium, posing a variety of environmental and health risks.

The polluted sites are often located close to urban areas and rivers. Organic pollutants and metals can leach into the soil, affecting food and water and risking biodiversity loss.

In order to address these threats and to reduce the risks of humans being exposed to them, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has analysed soil, water and sediment for 32 sites and delivered trainings so that local authorities could monitor soil quality and submit data to the country's environmental authorities. The officials have also been trained to set criteria to decide which sites should be prioritized for clean-up, putting the Serbian government in good stead for further clean-up actions. An interactive hotspot map has been created to help manage data for the polluted sites, and a national platform set up to share information on land degradation and sustainable land management.

"Healthy soil is central to many aspects of our daily lives, from safe food to a healthy place to live and play," said Bruno Pozzi, Director UNEP's Europe Office. "We are proud to have helped Serbia map contaminated soil sites for rehabilitation, supporting the country onto a cleaner path for its citizens and nature."

"Thanks to this project, we have a better idea of the scale and type of contamination faced. Serbia can now conduct more detailed investigations into individual polluted sites, carry out the transparent disposal of hazardous waste and ease its burden on our natural environment," said Dr Milan Milutinović of Belgrade's Institute of Public Health.

"Not only have we been able to carry out soil sampling and learned to apply new methodologies of risk assessment - the project has also helped us to ensure better cooperation between all levels of government," said Filip Radović, Director of the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency. "The Republic of Serbia has made the first step in setting priorities for soil remediation, with a lot more work ahead in this area that will require

additional support.”

“The purchases of soil analysis instruments, protective field equipment and software by the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea has also made a major difference,” he added. The project - officially closed at a meeting in Belgrade today - was funded by the Global Environment Facility and the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea.

The 14 priority sites include areas in and surrounding chemical factories and heavy industry; subject to further funding, the project’s next steps will be to remediate degraded hotspots, improve soil quality and reduce the impact of pollution on the ecosystem and on human health.

In the long term, the aim is for contaminated sites to be safely managed and soil quality monitored - especially in industrial, mining, power production and agricultural areas, which are major economic drivers in Serbia.

Izvor: unenvironment.org