

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) today launched the first ever nationwide efforts to identify and map contaminated soil sites for remediation in the Republic of Serbia.

The project takes place thanks to the support of the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea, which is contributing USD 400,000 for capacity building as part of the project; and the Global Environment Fund (GEF), which is providing USD 780,000 to cover broader costs.

Locations linked to energy production and the chemical or metal industries are among those to undergo closer examination for evidence of soil pollution. A national map will then be produced of contaminated sites and officials trained on monitoring and reporting so that clean-up efforts can get underway.

“Improving environmental standards is a key area for Serbia’s EU accession process, which Italy strongly supports. The UNEP soil pollution project funded by Italy is a concrete way to help Belgrade advance on this path,” said the Italian Ambassador to Serbia, Giuseppe Manzo.

“We decided to launch it here in the Embassy whose building turns 90 this year. And we are marking this special anniversary by turning the embassy a little ‘greener’ and reduce its environmental impact,” he revealed, referring to the building’s new heating, cooling and lighting systems and plans to install photovoltaic panels.

The decision to establish a list of polluted locations in Serbia for further investigation will be officially taken tomorrow at a steering committee meeting by UNEP together with the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection and other national bodies. The decision comes under a project run by UNEP and the Global Environment Fund titled ‘Enhanced cross-sectoral land management through land use pressure reduction and planning’.

Industrial production has been an economic driver in the Republic of Serbia, but has also been shown to be among the major causes of soil contamination. Among the various organic pollutants in the country are the heavy metals or potential carcinogens Zinc (Zn), Copper (Cu), Nickel (Ni), Chromium (Ch) and Cobalt (Co).

Locations close to industrial sites - generally on public or abandoned land - will therefore be given priority in the investigation, which will take place between March and October this year. The list of locations will be drawn up based on an inventory of 359 potentially contaminated sites.

“This project is of crucial importance for the Republic of Serbia - especially given the upcoming talks on the environment as part of the country’s bid to become a member of the

EU,” said Ms Stana Bozovic, Global Environment Fund (GEF) focal point and Serbian State Secretary for the Environment. “We highly grateful for UNEP’s support with the demanding task of investigating contaminated sites where a legacy of pollution has led to serious consequences for the environment,” she stressed.

“The health of our soils is key to so many aspects of our lives, such as food supply, water quality and flood protection,” said Jan Dusik, Director of UNEP’s Regional Office for Europe. “UNEP is proud to support Serbia’s efforts to manage soil in a way that reduces risks to human health and the environment,” he underlined.

UNEP is also laying the grounds for the Serbian government to be able to carry out remediation measures. Officials will be trained to collect data on contaminated sites and a national lab will be accredited for soil samples to be assessed. Criteria – such as distance from water courses, settlements and protected areas – will furthermore be put forwarded so that a list of sites to be remedied can be finalised.

As a result of the investigation, mapping and capacity building, the Serbian government will be able to establish a baseline for clean-up efforts, which are a national priority.

The project is in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 15 ‘Life on land,’ which aims to halt and reverse land degradation.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The ‘Enhanced cross-sectoral land management through land use pressure reduction and planning’ project was launched in September 2015 in the Serbian city of Novi Sad. The project is carried out under UNEP’s Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination. The project’s Steering Committee is made up of representatives from the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, Environmental Protection Agency, Government Office for Public Investments and Hydrometeorological Service, the Forestry Faculty of the University of Belgrade and UNEP, among other bodies.

A new law on soil was adopted by the Serbian Parliament in late 2015. Subsequent bylaws will oblige local authorities to provide information on soil contamination to the country’s environment agency.

A 2010 regulation already establishes limit and remediation values for soil pollutants. Soil which contains more than 12mg/kg of cadmium must be remedied for example.

UNEP supports national efforts to improve soil quality under its ecosystem management work area. Healthy soils support plant and animal diversity and productivity, regulate water flow, filter pollutants and store and cycle nutrients.

Serbia is expected to open negotiations on the environment chapter of its EU membership bid later this year.



UNEP Leads First Ever Nationwide Diagnosis of Contaminated soil of Republic of Serbia

source: unep.org