

The Common Forum on Contaminated Land in Europe: from national policy setting to RTD needs identification

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The COMMON FORUM on Contaminated Land in the European Union, initiated in 1994, is a network of contaminated land regulators and policy makers from national ministries and Environment Agencies in 17 European Union Member States (MS). During the last 20 years Common Forum has:

- a) developed new concepts for policies,
- b) assessed EU Directives proposals and identified critical issues for transposition,
- c) proposed technical guidance documents for EU Directive implementation in MS,
- d) identified RTD needs for closing the different knowledge gaps by EC and national programmes,
- e) in close relationship with other stakeholders (industries, brownfield redevelopers, research) and other European networks (NICOLE, CABERNET, SEDNET, ...).

The Contaminated Land policies evolved since the early 80s at the MS level. Three types of national policies were successively generated:

- a systematic approach (inventories, drastic control of sources) in the early 80s,
- around 1990, a contaminated land and risk assessment approach, with a real focus on land use for assessing and decision-making,
- since 2000, a Risk Based Land Management (RBLM concept) and solution design, which integrates spatial planning, soil, sediment & water management, socio-economy issues.

Some European Member States have already decided to implement the RBLM concept in their national legal framework (the Netherlands, France, Austria).

The regulatory environment at the European level is evolving rapidly and different European legal documents aim to take land issues into consideration (i.e. Industrial Emissions Directive or Environmental Liability Directive). In 2007 a Soil Protection Strategy has been published and a proposal of Directive discussed. The Soil Protection Directive is blocked at the European Council level since the last discussions under the Spanish Presidency in 2010. No official working party has been planned on this issue by the current or upcoming EU Presidencies. Nevertheless the Common Forum has continuously

discussed the technical and political aspects of the contaminated soil issues in the original proposal and in the alternative versions under each Presidency. Having failed to reach agreement in Council, in light of the desire of many Member States to have a framework directive for soil, and convinced that common grounds could be found; a “special task force” of Common Forum members from 6 Member States (Pro and Con) was established in July 2010 (Belgian Presidency). The task force discussed the reasons for not being able to reach agreement in Council and proposed amendments to the draft Directive. Extra experts involved in Chapter II (erosion, organic matter loss, landslides, etc.) were also invited and brought their experience to the discussions. The amendments were approved by the Common Forum in autumn 2011 and disseminated to all parties to support the debate (<http://www.commonforum.eu/SoilDirectiveAlternative.asp>).

Moreover besides directives addressing soil protection several other policies introduce further challenges like the new Resource Efficiency roadmap and the climate and energy targets for 2020, which are committing Europe to transforming itself into a highly energy-efficient, low carbon economy, while de-coupling of resource use and waste generation from economic growth. That’s why CF is currently on:

- a) The integration of sustainability pillars alongside effective risk-management, and in particular three key principles: being risk-informed, managing adaptively and taking a participatory approach.
- b) The extension of soil policy based on protection towards a policy on sustainable use of the land (soil and subsoil including groundwater, surface waters including sediments) to increase the economic benefits and to solve societal challenges.

For being able to achieve these objectives, further research and development will be needed. H2020 is seen as an opportunity to develop knowledge and innovations in this field and at the same time tackle some mutual societal challenges.

References: [1] www.commonforum.eu