

Press Release

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UM first to conclude a framework agreement with OVAM

[Brussels, 10 December 1997 - Within the continclude of the Flemish Soil Remediation Decree, UM recently became the first company in Flanders to conclude with the Flemish government a framework agreement for an integrated approach to dealing with the historical soil pollution of all its company sites in Flanders.

The agreement, which is for a period of 10 years, covers the investigation and carrying out of soil remediation for the purpose of removing all the serious risks arising from the historical soil pollution at UM's Flemish company sites.

At the same time, the Limburg University Centre, OVAM and UM will also be collaborating in a research syndicate to develop products that will ensure the simple and effective remediation of the soil in the immediate vicinity of the factories concerned.

Within the continclude of the Flemish Soil Remediation Decree, UM has carried out a series of studies into the quality of the soil and groundwater at its factory sites in Balen, Hoboken, Olen and Overpelt.

In addition, two recognised independent research bodies -- VITO (the Flemish Institute for Technological Research) and TAUW Milieu -- have been asked to investigate the risks associated with the pollution that is revealed by these studies.

From these studies it appears that:

The soil and the groundwater at certain places on the factory sites have been polluted by more than 100 years of industrial activity;

The risks associated with this historical pollution can be controlled and managed if suitable remediation measures are implemented.

What these measures will be will depend on the sites concerned, but they may involve:

- a. covering or excavating polluted soils
- b. draining or pumping out and purifying polluted groundwater
- c. a combination of these techniques.

In order to implement these measures, UM has concluded a 10-year framework agreement with OVAM (the Flemish Waste Disposal Authority) under the supervision of the Flemish Minister for the Environment. The agreement will enable UM to tackle, in an integrated manner, the problems of soil contamination at all its factories in Flanders and thus perform the necessary remediations in a systematic fashion.

This agreement forms the reference framework within which UM will then proceed to carry out the planned soil remediations. The agreement consists of 3 phases:

- The carrying out of descriptive soil surveys for all UM's sites in Flanders.
- Determining the order of priorities and the nature of the remediation projects.
- Carrying out these remediation projects.

In the interim, suitable precautionary measures have already been taken to prevent further spreading of the historical pollution.

Because UM is also very much committed to tackling the pollution problems in the immediate vicinity of its factories, a soil immobilisation research syndicate has been set up with the Limburg University Centre (LUC) and OVAM. The aim of this initiative is to develop products and methods that will allow a simple and effective remediation of the metal-polluted soils in the immediate vicinity of the factories.

These two initiatives are evidence of UM's desire and determination to implement its human environment policy thoroughly and without compromise.

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