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## **DANGER: OBSOLETE PESTICIDES**

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In Poland, obsolete pesticides have been considered a serious ecological problem for over a decade. It comes down to two issues: the first one being the tombs and warehouses, the other one being the post-production waste landfill Rudna Gora owned by the Chemical Plant “Organika-Azot” S.A., a pesticide producer in Jaworzno. Due to their potential of releasing harmful substances into the soil and water, the tombs were back then called an ecological bomb, whose “explosion” depends on tomb structure and the hydrogeological profile of a site.

It is estimated that in Poland there were close to 300 tombs containing around 15,000 – 20,000 tons of obsolete pesticides and not all of them have yet been found and inventoried. Currently, after several years of efforts, financed mostly from national funds, there is still around 120 tombs left with 5,000 – 7,000 tons of pesticides. That means that 65% of waste has already been cleaned up. It is estimated that all tombs should be closed by 2010, but we will still have to deal with contaminated sites, which pose varying degrees of threat to underground water, as it is impossible to fully reclaim sites where contaminants spread throughout large areas of land surrounding the tombs.

The Rudna Gora landfill in the town of Jaworzno is a real, unresolved problem with transborder implications, placed on the list of “hot spots” drafted for the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea. The landfill, which takes up 20 ha, stores about 160,000 tons of waste, of which 88,000 is hazardous. The different types of waste cannot be separated, because they are all mixed together. Most of them are wastes produced as a result of syntheses of organochlorine insecticides: DDT, lindane, tetradifon and metoxychlor, but there are also other pesticide active substances, breakdown products and post-synthesis waste. Underground and surface waters in the Vistula River basin flowing into the Baltic Sea are mainly contaminated with lindane, inactive HCH isomers, chlorfenvinfos and substances that belong to the group of Persistent Organic Pollutants, like aldrin, DDT and HCB.

Over the years the Plant, being the owner of the landfill, has undertaken a number of different programs intended to limit the impact of the landfill. The geological profile of the

site is well known. Regular monitoring of surface and underground waters allows for accurate assessment of the range of contamination and the direction of contaminants migration. Contamination of the site is confirmed and well documented by the existing studies, but there is no consensus on what would be the most effective and feasible method of neutralizing the landfill. It is a problem which Poland will probably not be able to resolve on her own. It is not only the question of funding. It is a situation, where the universal rules of the EU law like “the polluter pays”, or limitations on availability of public subsidies for companies, imported into the legislation of a post-communist country not only do not help, but rather hinder solving the problem. The Plant, which is the owner of the landfill and is now held legally liable for its cleanup, does not in fact bear responsibility for pollution of the environment and cannot receive support from outside sources, is by itself unable to do anything about the issue due to lack of conception and funding. The current quagmire is a result of the system that vanished into history, the real threat to the environment, however, has remained.

This situation makes it a case of its own, and it calls for an individual approach. It seems that actions should concentrate around programs and regulations related to the protection of the Baltic Sea, which utilize the research and scientific potential of the Baltic states, who are genuinely concerned about finding an effective solution to the problem.

Currently under HELCOM (the Helsinki Convention), there is a new environmental strategy being prepared for the Baltic Sea region, the so called Baltic Action Plan, with one of the segments devoted to “Reducing the input of hazardous substances”. Germany, Sweden and Latvia are in charge of developing this part of the Plan. They have just started working on the last and most important stage of drafting the plan, which will detail all steps and actions which need to be taken.

Resolving the problem of the Rudna Gora landfill requires a supervisory input and coordination of a number of aspects – organizational, financial and technological. It is crucial to, first of all, conduct a final environmental impact assessment of the landfill (by a group of international experts) and develop an effective technology of neutralizing the site as well as direct the collaboration of Poland with other countries (especially the Baltic Sea states), taking into account the legal and financial conditions. The actions could be inspired by the “Working Group on Obsolete Pesticides in the European Parliament”.