

ACR+ REFLECTIONS FOLLOWING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN VALENCIA ON SLUDGE AND BIOWASTE, 16-17 June 2011

The Valencia Conference was really interesting from a number of different perspectives: regulatory, economical and technical. Several study contributions have identified the environmental impacts and costs of different types of management and treatment in that field.

All the presentations (available on the ACR+ website) will assist you to understand in depth this complex issue.

The “sludge” concept, on a first glance is not really attractive. But it can (and must) be seen as another waste flow, as a “resource”. Thus, political orientations for sludge management have to be based on the “legal binding hierarchy” of the new Waste Framework Directive and subsequently on the 3Rs approach (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle)

The “sludge” issue is rather complex due to the various different types of sludge and terminologies: besides the wording “sewage sludge”, we can also refer to: “dredging sludge”, “drinking water sludge” “industrial sludge”, and linked to this, other key terminologies appear such as “biowaste” “biosolids” and “biodegradable waste”.

THUS A VERY IMPORTANT PROGRESS should be a clarification of those different terms and a clear basic classification in that field.

There is also a great complexity concerning the potential treatment of sludge, mainly due to the different technologies available on the market and also to the potential combination of material recovery and/or energy recovery.

The European Union should give clear guidance based on a coherent, thorough approach of several political aspects: solid waste and water policies but also soil, energy and chemical policies respectively.

We surely don't need numerous European regulations but we need a handful very strong legal indication for the prevention and the recycling of sewage sludge and biowaste.

So why not to formulate two different directives: one on “biowaste” (as required by a resolution of the European Parliament) and a second one on “sewage sludge”. The distinction between those two flows is justified on the basis of the different types of risks such as: hazard, contamination and/or pollution.

For the **prevention** of biowaste and for the prevention of sludge, the European Commission should develop guidelines in relationship with the national waste prevention programme under which the Member States have to elaborate by implementing the Waste Framework Directive.

Concerning the recycling of biowaste, the legal orientation should be: separated collection of biowaste with a minimum target of at least 35%.

Concerning the recycling of sludge, the legal prescription is to at least develop the necessary Quality Assurance Systems in relation to public health. This should enhance clear restrictions to be placed amongst some forms of sludge treatment and the different types of sludge.

We have to apply subsidiarity. There are many different local / geographical conditions especially in the soil composition between Member States. In any case, it remains to promote the exchange of information and experience between public authorities responsible for sludge policy formulation or implementation. Thus, we are in need of a clearer common legal orientation for biodegradable waste at the EU level more firm than what we have today.

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