

No horizon for salt landfills restoration

People are told that mining of salt and potassium are the economic future of district of Bages, in Catalonia. The magic word that's supposed to solve everything is repeated once and again: *project Phoenix*. However, the facts and the figures of the project suggest that Iberpotash, the mining company, seeks for increasing the salt landfills and by-passing the legal requirement of restoration.

In April 2008, the autonomous government of Generalitat in Catalonia signed the environmental authorisation to the mining activity in Sallent and Balsareny, provided that, before 2010, the brine springs that appear in the streams of Soldevila and Riudor, by the river Llobregat in its stretches of Pont Nou and L'Illa in Sallent and the one in Fusteret that joins the river Cardener in Suria must be collected. However, nothing is done. By now, there is just a *preliminary environmental document* for a second brine collector from Cardona and Balsareny to Abrera, still far from a real project.

The environmental authorisation was linked to a so-called restoration program with a guarantee of 585.153€ to afford the restoration of landfill of Cogulló that occupies 49 Has and contains roughly 40 million tons of salt residues. In November 2011, the court ended a case that was promoted by Mr. Sebastià Estradé, a lawyer from Sallent. The sentence dictates that the program can't delay the restoration until 2035 and that the guarantee disagrees on the real cost. However, instead of going on with the restoration, Iberpotash claims against the sentence.

Present situation is even worse. Iberpotash lobbies for additional 7,6 Has extension of the landfill of Cogulló to the west, towards Santpedor. The procedure is seen as a Special Plan in the municipality of Sallent. In this Plan, restoration is just not foreseen; it's something for, at least, one hundred year time.

Subsequent to the increase of salt landfills and the lack of restoration, the saline contamination of water still will go on with *project Phoenix* of mining extension in Suria. The plant of *vacuum* salt that's planned in Suria should increase the sales of salt. But figures provided by the company and calculations done by Estudi Ramon Folch, one independent agency, result in a balance of near 1.200.000 tons/year of salt residues to waste, depending on project phases and scenarios. The bigger scale of mining in Suria compensates the expected increase in sales of salt. Under *project Phoenix*, the salt residues landfills, the worst environmental disaster in Catalonia, will grow. As a result, the cost of water supply in half of Catalonia, the invoice of water, the devastation in Soldevila valley and the distortion of the landscape in central Catalonia will continue to grow as well.

This lack of compliance to environmental regulations is a huge hidden subsidy to Iberpotash that ruins public finances –specifically that of Water Agency in Catalonia- and provides to Iberpotash a position of unfair competition. The big money that Iberpotash omits in restoration and control of brine from salt landfills is nowadays invested in a new tunnel to access the mine of Suria. The tunnel will allow mining increase. However, to pretend to ignore the environmental offense can't last forever. In a modern state, laws must be fulfilled today, not in one hundred years time. And in any state of the European Union the European Directives must be accomplished, also the Directive 2006/21/CE on the management of waste from extractive industries.

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