

Successful meeting on soil pollution and remediation in Riga (Latvia)

On the 14th and 15th of October, the UIC Expert Group on polluted soils and remediation organised a two day seminar in Riga, the capital of Latvia. The meeting was hosted by Latvijas dzelzceļš (LDZ, Latvian Railways). Almost 50 participants from different European railways were welcomed by Mr. Māris Riekstiņš, Director of Development of LDZ.

In his opening statement Mr. Riekstiņš gave an overview of the developments LDZ is going through, as well as the difficulties it encounters. One of these is the question of contaminated soils of railway properties. He welcomed the close cooperation with UIC and with individual railways, more specifically the exchange of information and experiences.

Since 2007 the UIC expert group on polluted soils and remediation is actively trying to get polluted soils on the agenda of the railways. Furthermore the objective of the expert group is to promote the exchange of specific know how in this field. One of the main objectives of the meeting in Riga was to draw attention on the impact that soil pollution might have, not only on train operations, but also on the corporate financial position and reputation in society.

Polluted soils are as old as the railways themselves. Most of the pollution we are facing nowadays, has its roots in the steam age. In those days railways, like any other business at that time, didn't care much about the consequences the dumping of oil and waste might have on the ecological environment. Nowadays we know better and although the majority of the railway companies have taken action to remediate the most urgent sites and to prevent further contamination, there still are huge problems. These problems occur when the railway land has to be transferred to new owners or when the use of land for other purposes is being prepared.

At the meeting in Riga the participants were addressed from several points of view. First the governmental perspective where legislation and policy implementation were highlighted by Mr. Roland Bebris (Latvian ministry of Environment) and Mr. Ton Honders (Dutch ministry of Environment). The consequences of legislation were presented as well as the approach of overall risk management by the Dutch government.

In a meeting like this the financial perspective is indispensable. Polluted soils can be part of the corporate property and it is clear that the possession of such property can impose a high risk with significant negative effects on the financial position of the company. Based on their respective experiences, Mr. Bertil Grundfelt and Mr. Erhard Robold (both are consultants in this field) clearly showed the audience how to deal with the involved risks.

In the afternoon session the focus was mainly on the sharing of best practises. Three cases were presented by:

(1) Mr. Mads Dige Toft, RAMBØLL (Banedanmark), who highlighted the typical practical issues on handling polluted soil that goes along with both project planning and project execution.

(2) Mrs. Patrizia Gregori (SNCF), who presented the 2008 - 2015 programme of SNCF to improve and to renew the fuel filling installations of the railnetwork, while at the same time the contaminated sites are remediated for a total of € 60 million.

(3) Ms. Ināra Krumiņa (LDZ) gave an overview of the work that is going on in Daugavpils, which is located in the Southern part of Latvia. On this site the groundwater is severely

contaminated with diesel and oil from the mass storage facilities and is in the process of remediation.

The last point of view that was presented concerned the prevention of soil pollution. Mr. Paolo Contestabili, who is the UIC representative in the InfraGuider project, presented the ambitions and scope of this project to set guidelines for the purchase of sustainable railinfra systems and components. His view was supported by Malin Kotake, who shared some experiences of Trafikverket (Sweden) in this field with the participants.

Finally the meeting ended with a quick look at the future development of the work of UIC in the field of sustainable landuse.

The different presentations from the seminar can be downloaded from UIC's homepage,
<http://www.uic.org/spip.php?article2635>

The second day was devoted to a visit of a LDZ Rolling Stock service point where the filling station has been renewed. The final part of the excursion was a visit to the Latvian Railway History Museum in Riga, where the poster of the seminar was handed to the manager of the museum, so if you ever come to Riga and visit the Railway History Museum you might see the poster hanging at the wall.

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*(Initial draft by Harold Resida,
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