

Quarriers slam waste law

Suppliers call on MEPs not to pass new legislation which exaggerates the hazard of aggregate waste

by Paul Howard (*Construction News* Thursday 1st September 2005)

MEPs HAVE been urged not to compare uranium mines to sandpits when they give a second reading to the EU Mine Waste Directive next week. The warning comes from aggregates suppliers following amendments to the draft directive tabled by an EU environment committee.

The amendments threaten to bring the full legislative burden of the directive to bear on waste products from aggregate extraction. Quarry Products Association director general Simon van der Byl said: "The Common Position made it quite clear this wasn't the case and accepted there were different levels of danger for different sites. A uranium mine should not be compared to a sandpit." Mr van der Byl said this meant the legal requirements placed on companies extracting metals and using toxic materials in the process did not apply to aggregates. The proposed amendments threaten to overturn this exemption. Mr van der Byl said: "This is entirely disproportionate. Comparing the potential risk with the potential liability, it's taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut."

The suggestion of an overreaction has been echoed by the British Aggregates Association. BAA secretary Peter Huxtable said: "Overburden from aggregate extraction is pretty innocuous. It is classed by the EU as non-hazardous and non-inert and it contains no nasty toxins. It should also be pointed out there are existing rules covering the physical stability of any waste mounds."

Mr Huxtable laid the blame for the amendments at the door of ill-informed environmental campaigners. He said: "They're simply saying aggregates waste is the largest volume of material covered by the legislation and they can't possibly believe it doesn't pose a problem. If aggregates waste is required to undergo the same tests as more toxic material it will mean extra cost and time." The situation will be exacerbated if other amendments are also approved changing the requirements covering financial guarantees for the restoration of quarries.

Aside from requiring the money to be available upfront rather than held in reserve, Mr van der Byl said the new scheme was not needed. He added: "We think it means land outside a quarry that could be damaged has to be covered — yet it is already covered by the environmental liability directive. It's totally unnecessary duplication."

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