

## Delays to the Zonal Plan force six municipalities to take their refuse to Alicante

Transporting it will significantly increase refuse collection tax in these places

The north of Castellón province can no longer treat its own refuse. As there is no treatment plant in our area, refuse is to be sent to Novelda for treatment and elimination. This will mean a big increase in refuse collection tax for the residents of Vinaros, Benicarló, Peñíscola, Alcala de Xivert-Alcossebre, Torreblanca and Oropesa. It is the solution proposed by the Diputación Provincial, a proposal which the affected municipalities will have to adjust to as soon as possible.

As if fulfilling a biblical prophesy, the day has arrived when we are buried under our own refuse. The Urban Solid Waste sites for the growing municipalities along the coast are full to the brim. There is no more room to hide refuse because with the current poor recycling figures we have in the province, all we can do with refuse is hide it out of sight. The gigantic carpet under which we have swept the dirt up to now has finally said "no more!".

### Aparici's Plan

During the last weeks of October, Vicent Aparici, Vicepresidente of the Castellón Diputación, has contacted the different municipalities in Zone I where the solution for treating refuse is pending, explaining the proposal to them and to the media and asking for a consensus view of the political groups in the Diputación in a meeting held with their representatives.

Aparici explained that "we are counting on the support and cooperation of companies and councils to move this plan forward and therefore we are going to get to work on it immediately". Through this plan "all the municipalities in Zone I will take their refuse either to the tips controlled by the Diputación or to treatment plants" he stated. "This plan would be the beginning of the treatment project as agreed by the consortium so that "the management company authorised by the consortium in the corresponding zonal plan, would be charged with managing the refuse, for which it would make use of the facilities which can be used for this, until the facilities which are planned for it are built".

Vicent Aparici stated that "councils share concern with the Diputación about the plant at Cervera and are also demanding an immediate decision from the Conselleria, regarding the relevant authorisations". He also wanted to make it clear that "this plan anticipates that municipalities will receive an immediate temporary decision and is the first step towards the concessionaire for the zone taking charge of managing refuse treatment", and continued by confirming that "it is absolutely essential that the plant at Cervera is built with the greatest urgency".

The vicepresident demanded that the Conselleria "should give an immediate resolution by the environmental autho-

rities for the construction of the plant at Cervera, in the location approved with the consensus of the political groups within the consortium", a matter which as we have commented is supported by the affected municipalities in the zone and by the refuse management companies within it.

The proposal from the Head of the Diputación's Environment Department, Vicent Aparici, will mean that refuse has to be transported to the municipality of Novelda, in Alicante province - more than 300 kilometres away - for treatment and elimination. The direct consequences; a journey of 300 kilometres crossing the community from north to south, the need to create a transfer plant to compress the refuse to optimize the use of the transport and a big increase in the costs of refuse treatment will have direct repercussions for the final user. The person who always foots the bill for bad planning and management, the residents.

### An unsustainable situation

When analysing the problem it is important to consider its causes. As El 7 Set has already pointed out in Issue 115 based on the complaints against the Oropesa tip, the refuse disposal hot potato threatens to explode in someone's hands. The problem originates, one of life's ironies, from the beginning of the solution - the approval on the 4th October 2001 of the Zonal Waste Plan for Zone 1. This started a process in which the different municipalities in the province were grouped into zones, with the north of Castellón defined as Zone 1, and this then gave rise to the dilemma of where to put the waste disposal plant.

The Zonal Plan defined a centre of gravity as the best geographical point to give the easiest logistics. It aimed to find the nearest point to those municipalities producing the greatest amount of waste, with access which was not too complicated. That's where the problems started, because by adhering strictly to this point, when new municipalities were included in Zone 1 after its parameters had been decided upon, it upset these predictions. The central point which the Zonal Plan placed in Cervera del Maestre should have been moved to the east, towards the coast, closer to municipalities like Santa Magdalena de Pulpis or Peñíscola. A "peccadillo" compared with what was to come later.

Alcala started to be talked of as the location for the plant, and several did opt for this municipality. But politics came into the argument and at the first change the PSOE and EU hoisted the question to attack the PP which was in government at the time. This irresponsibility could do more on the eve of the elections; a weapon like refuse disposal was not to be wasted, so the Council, chaired by Francisco Juan Mars, backed down, closed ranks and said that

the plant was for someone else. And then Azahar Environment arrived.

With this UTE, composed of Teconma-Azahar Environment-Sistema Ecocodeco, entering the struggle, this brought everyone into the lottery. UTE only looked at the Cervera location, compared with the rest who lit candles to God and the Devil. There was little to work at, technology had taken a shine to the Palacio de las Aulas.

In Cervera there was a suitable location considered in the Zonal Plan, in Els Clots, but this did not please the PSOE as it is close to the urban centre. This led to a systematic confrontation between PP and PSOE regarding the location of the plant, during which they were unable to reach a consensus and which intensified with the 2003 municipal elections. With the arrival of the socialists in the mayor's office, they opted to take the treatment plant to La Bassa, which led to rage in Calig and there rests the dream of the just.

PP and PSOE have been unable to reach any consensus in connection with waste treatment in the north of the province. As the position of mayor has changed hands, first one then another has significantly changed their position in this regard. Clearly the current position of paralysis, which the Environmental Declaration from the Conselleria has declared, has been made more difficult by the change of location for the plant from Els Clots to La Bassa - as it was not originally planned for there - which resulted from a tacit agreement between PP and PSOE when they were looking the other way. The regional PSOE direction let them remove the problem from Cervera although it would create one in Calig and the PP in Castellón were happy that the socialists of both municipalities and of the region would be at loggerheads among themselves, and, in passing, located the waste plant with pats on the back for everyone.

Both majority parties mutually scratched each other's backs faced with a problem with which no-one wanted to dirty their hands.

### Collateral problems

Besides the damage to the environment caused by the delay in putting the RSU treatment plant into operation, the four years it has taken the process, and what remains, amendments to the project will be required. It must be remembered that the project selected was based on bio drainage, with the volume of waste to be processed based on 1995 population figures, and is still the same with 12 year old data. During this time some of the affected towns have almost doubled their population.

The delay in constructing the plant at Cervera also creates other problems, such as the impossibility of putting the contract for Torreblanca's waste collection out to tender. This has been postponed repeatedly because in the short

term the terms under which the service is to be carried out are not known. To this can be added problems such as waste tips which are illegal or unregulated as in the case of Oropesa, and others such as Santa Magdalena, which would enter the rumpus on the rebound.

### The solution

The Diputación's way forward consists of taking our waste 300 kilometres to Alicante. This will need a transfer plant to gather together the waste from each of the six municipalities affected. The waste will be taken to the plant by the waste management companies in each town. In the transfer plant, the

waste would be compressed and loaded into large lorries for the journey to Novelda. The creation of this transfer plant was not considered in any of the transfer plants considered in the UTE TECONMA-AZAHAR ENVIROMENT-ECODECO in Zone 1 (Morella "La caseta de la bruixa"), Zone 2 (Vilafranca "Partida de la carrasca") and Zone 5 (Benloch "Partida de Venasques"). The option being used is to adapt one of the existing pulping plants, possibly Sant Mateu, to treat the waste from the six towns, bringing it into the dance without having any say in the matter.

Translates Brenda Cundell

## Assessment of the measures

Oropesa is moving forward with the solution proposed by Vicent Aparici for the waste tips along the north coast of Zone 1. As mayor Rafael Albert explained, the concessionaire company for the waste collection service in the town had the Conselleria's approval to close and seal off the current tip which is in an unregulated situation, "so that no more waste is dumped in this tip". Albert said that "for some weeks, the company has been compressing the waste and taking it to a legal tip outside the town". Regarding the cost of this change, Albert indicated that "at present we have not been advised of an official estimate of the costs, it is a necessary solution which has to be adopted and we hope that although the increase may be significant, it will not be too burdensome for people. We must also take into account the fact that the refuse collection tax has not been reviewed since 2003".

In Torreblanca, the council is working with the concessionaire company to assess the increase which the new waste treatment will mean for the town. Sources on the Council assure us that "if this increase is very great, the Council will investigate settling the

increase in stages, with municipal funds taking on part of the cost making the increase more manageable for people". However, the same sources say that "although this will mean an increase in cost, this solution is necessary because of the problems of eliminating waste in our zone and we believe it is positive because it will be a way for there to be no contamination from the waste and for it to be properly treated in the hope that the Cervera plant will be operating soon". In Alcala de Xivert, the mayor, Francisco Juan Mars, said that the solution was positive for the waste problem, with the tips practically full to the brim and with the delay to the plant. He indicated that it was not possible to assess the cost of waste collection which people would incur, although in his view this would be around the figure estimated at the time for the Cervera plant. The mayor explained that part of the solution proposed by the Diputación will be to create a transfer plant in the Sant Mateu pulping plant facilities, where the collection and compressing of the waste will be centralized and then it will be taken to a legal tip.



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