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Sustainable soil management leads to better soil quality and land use

Flanders has one of the most progressive legislations on soil remediation in Europe. The Soil Decree, adopted in 1996, provides Flanders with a powerful instrument to fight historical soil pollution and to prevent and remediate new soil pollution.

The Decree makes an important distinction between historical and new pollution and between the duty to remediate and liability. The key objective is to protect new land owners. When a property is being transferred a soil certificate from the land information register is required, plus a soil status report, prepared by recognised experts if and when risk activities have taken place there in the past.

In barely 15 years' time, Flemish companies and OVAM have acquired considerable knowledge and know-how regarding soil standards, research and remediation techniques. Today, OVAM primarily aims at developing innovative soil remediation techniques, with projects such as green and sustainable remediation, and alternative financing schemes, such as sectoral soil remediation funds.

In cases where the parties involved are unable or refuse to remediate (for example in the event of bankruptcy), OVAM has the right to intervene in order to prevent the situation from deteriorating or to minimise the environmental damage. Its first objective then is of course to restore, remediate and/or manage the environmental damage, but in addition a lot of attention is being paid to the principles of sustainable material use and the social and economic redevelopment of those contaminated sites.

Flanders is a very densely populated area, so it is key to clean up and redevelop these so-called 'brownfields' for new business opportunities, public services, housing facilities, ... Therefore the Flemish Region and OVAM give investors and companies the opportunity to negotiate (financial) agreements in exchange for a quicker soil remediation and redevelopment of contaminated sites.

Soil management and remediation are complex and tricky issues as the inconveniences or nuisances may be far-reaching and the costs high. However, this should never stand in the way of an ecologically sound future or new investments. A specific approach for residential areas and new programmes for schools, hospitals or rest homes helps to protect these important social groups and will offer them tailored solutions.

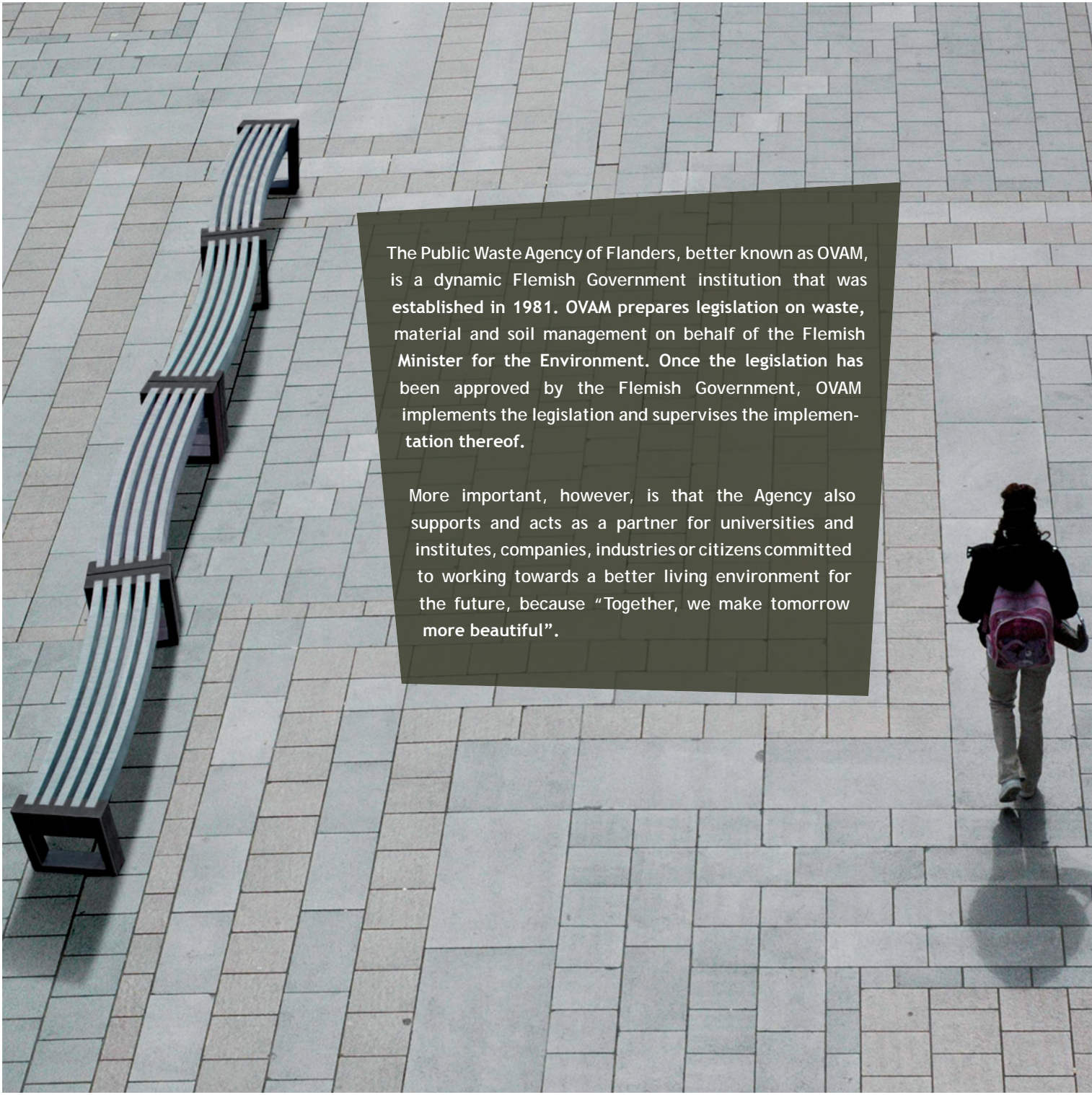
A driving force for a sustainable Flanders

The Flemish waste, material and soil policies implemented by OVAM have significantly contributed to and have been the driving force behind the development of a whole range of industrial activities such as environmental consultancy, waste collection & recycling, waste treatment, soil research and remediation techniques, etc.

OVAM dedicates itself to continuing this process, creating and stimulating a green circular economy in which today's waste products become tomorrow's resources, and where soil and land are used in a sustainable and eco-efficient manner.

Public Waste Agency of Flanders (OVAM)





The Public Waste Agency of Flanders, better known as OVAM, is a dynamic Flemish Government institution that was established in 1981. OVAM prepares legislation on waste, material and soil management on behalf of the Flemish Minister for the Environment. Once the legislation has been approved by the Flemish Government, OVAM implements the legislation and supervises the implementation thereof.

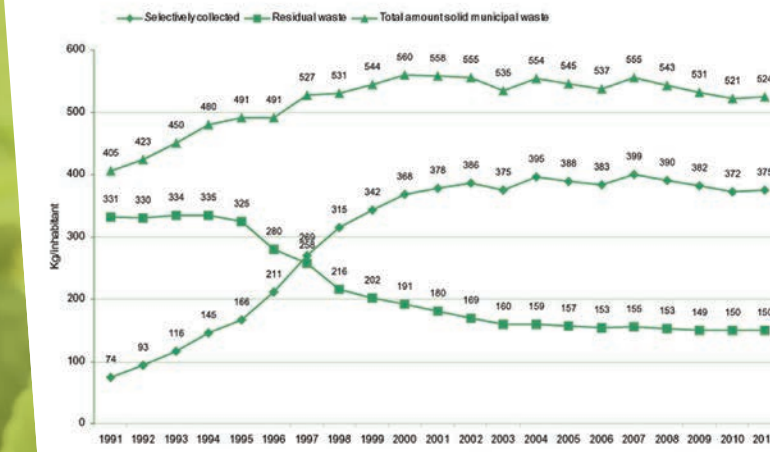
More important, however, is that the Agency also supports and acts as a partner for universities and institutes, companies, industries or citizens committed to working towards a better living environment for the future, because “Together, we make tomorrow more beautiful”.



Sustainable waste and material management leads to significant results

Over the past 30 years (the first Waste Decree dates from 1981), the way in which we handle waste has fundamentally changed. The policy advocated by OVAM is continuously evolving. Whereas this policy initially focused on cleaning up waste and setting up an efficient waste management infrastructure, the focus has now shifted to waste prevention and sustainable material use.

Today, Flanders' waste management and its waste management policy are among the most successful in Europe. About 71% of the household waste in Flanders is collected separately at the source in order to be reused, recycled or composted. Some 27% is incinerated in incinerators equipped with state-of-the-art flue gas cleaning systems and energy recovery systems. Less than 1% of all household waste is being landfilled.



To achieve these objectives, the Flemish Government and OVAM developed a whole host of policy instruments, including levies, take-back obligations, voluntary environmental agreements, landfilling and incineration bans, waste management plans, awareness raising and information campaigns, financial schemes, etc.



Cradle to cradle, a new approach to waste and material issues

Despite the excellent results of our waste management policy and systems, we are still wasting materials and energy on a massive scale. The obvious solution is to produce and consume in a more sustainable way. Traditional waste management focuses mainly on the end-of-life phase, the phase where a product becomes waste. Recently OVAM has broadened its horizon towards sustainable material management. The idea behind this is to manage the entire material chain, from “cradle to cradle”. As primary raw materials are becoming more and more scarce, the aim is to close the material loop and to become a green circular economy where discarded products are reused and recycled to replace primary raw materials.

With this goal in mind, we actively go for the transition towards a sustainable materials management. Since 2012, the new Materials Decree stands for the new policy direction, with the development and support of a number of instruments and measures to help producers, designers and consumers to apply principles of cleaner production, eco-efficiency, ecodesign and innovation. The Flemish Materials Program was initiated by OVAM to work towards a sustainable materials management, together with a broad group of stakeholders. 45 actions make the transition concrete. Plan C is a network that continuously develops the long term vision. And the Policy Research Centre (SuMma) studies sustainable materials management and provides academic support.