

Private company contracted to monitor Sant Antnin air quality

By **NESTOR LAIVIERA**

A private company has been contracted by WasteServ to monitor the air quality around the newly-inaugurated Sant Antnin Waste recycling plant in Marsascala, says Resources Minister George Pullicino.

Speaking during the inauguration of the plant, Pullicino added that the Marsascala local council would also be “involved in the monitoring - we have nothing to hide,” Pullicino said.

The move is an attempt to respond to repeated concerns by Marsascala residents who have long-complained about the move to locate the plant so close to the village’s population centre.

The inauguration event itself was very well attended as various government officials, ambassadors, and others who were present by invite all flocked to Marsascala, braving the morning drizzle *en masse*.

During his address, Pullicino spoke of the country’s need to keep up with EU modernisation and contemporary EU standards on waste management. Nine years ago, when the first stage of the waste recycling plant was completed, Pullicino said, the government wanted to make a leap of quality in the way waste is handled locally.

Since then, he said, over 33 thousand tonnes of recyclable waste have been processed; meaning that over 420 containers of reusable materials left the gates of the plant. “This was possible thanks to the changes introduced in waste collection when the first part of the plant was completed.”

He pointed out the plant’s inauguration coincides with the European Week for waste reduction. He reiterated the government’s plan to ensure that 10 per cent of Malta’s energy production is generated from renewable energy sources.

He affirmed that within the coming months, energy would begin being generated from the gases released by fermenting organic waste at the plant, describing this energy as “clean”.

He did not however specify how much of the mandatory 10 per cent this source of energy would consistute.

He also revealed that a private company has been contracted by WasteServ to monitor the air quality around the newly-inaugurated Sant Antnin Waste recycling plant in Marsascala.

Pullicino augured that the experience of setting up this first plant has “helped us mature” so that the construction and establishment of similar plants in the future “might be done better and easier.”

Also speaking during the inauguration, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi affirmed that the event is not simply just another ribbon-cutting, but indicated a shift in the national mentality towards waste management – “especially when waste and its management was something that until a short while ago was rarely mentioned.”

As an intrinsic part of the “environment talk”, Gonzi maintained that the waste problem is something that needs to be found solutions to. He said that the inauguration of the plant is very significant for a country facing a waste challenge that is bigger than that faced by other, larger countries.

He pointed to Malta's small size, high population density, tourism influx, and high vehicle congestion as factors that all come together to heighten the problem. "We do not have the luxury of shipping our waste off to some corner like some other countries do. The economies of scale work against us."

Gonzi pointed to the recurrent expenditure the plant requires, adding also that the plant itself cost €27 million to finalise. €18 million of these originated from EU funding.

Gonzi also reiterated government plans for the country to start treating all sewage before being dumped at sea. He affirmed that this could be a "first", as currently no other country can boast of being able to treat 100 per cent of its sewage before release.

He also announced how heat energy from the waste collected would be 'donated' to Inspire, for the heating of its Razzett Tal-Hbiberija pool, located nearby.

A 'recycled' monument was also unveiled during the ceremony – made from scraps and reused stone left over from various government projects such as building and church restorations.

Later on, the PL however affirmed that the party "could not be accomplice to an abusive and distorted process such as that which led to the construction of the new Sant'Antnin recycling centre."

In a statement, the party said that while I is in favor of the principle of recycling and of obtaining renewable energy from recycling, it is against the process that led to such an "abusive and tainted" project.

Party spokesperson for the Environment Leo Brincat maintained that not enough studies were made in the selection of the site, something which was even noted by the Church Environment Commission.

What is known as an "Alternative Site Assessment", Brincat said, called for according to MEPA's terms of reference, was not done "seriously" and despite these "irregularities", he added, "the project was nevertheless accepted and approved by authorities."

Brincat also affirmed that "originally, no necessary studies on the impact and emissions other dust particles expected to originate from the plant would have on residents' health, with the weak and unacceptable abuse that these studies would have been too expensive for the country."

He also hit out at the government's consultation process, and the way MEPA "was completely servile to the government's will" throughout the process, and every decision was taken "on the spot" without any "serious" deliberation.

Sant'Antnin plant inaugurated

by di-ve.com - editorial@di-ve.com

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The €27 million Sant'Antnin waste recycling plant was officially inaugurated by Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi on Thursday morning.

The inauguration marked the third and final phase of the project, which included the installation of equipment to transform waste into enough electricity to power 1,400 households. The equipment will also be used to heat the swimming pool of the nearby Inspire facility for people with disabilities, saving

the foundation €30,000 annually.

Dr Gonzi – whose own home is close to the plant – said that he had witnessed the transformation of the site over the years.

Although it once hosted a foul-smelling waste dump and a sewage treatment facility, a new, clean, waste treatment facility was now in place, and the landfill was being transformed into a family park.

The inauguration ceremony, however, was boycotted by the Labour Party, with environment spokesman Leo Brincat stating that the party could not be an accomplice to a building which was the result of an abusive process.

While expressing the party's support for recycling, it noted that no proper studies on the identification of the site or studies on the emissions generated were made. Moreover, the consultation process was "insulting", while MEPA had been entirely servile to the government, the MP lamented.

The Nationalist Party, meanwhile, was far more positive in its appraisal of the plant, and lamented Labour's negative attitude. It also accused Labour leader Joseph Muscat of attempting to block EU funding for the project when he was an MEP.