

Waste treatment – 28-05-08

Minister Ezra, Ambassador den Hond, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

Welcome to this first seminar on waste treatment.

It is good to be back in Israel. This is my third trip to Israel in one year. This time I will focus on economic, social and cultural matters next to the usual political issues. I will be visiting the mayors of Tel Aviv and Haifa tomorrow; they will be giving me presentations on the economic and social developments in their cities and present and future cooperation with the Netherlands. These presentations will also give me a good impression of the progress that Israel has made over the past 60 years in practically every industrial sector.

Today's seminar will focus on methods and technologies that the Netherlands has to offer with regard to waste treatment as well as an overview of how Dutch municipalities and the central government deal with the problem. It is in fact the second seminar that the Netherlands Embassy in Israel is organizing in the environmental area. The first seminar that was held in December 2007 dealt with soil remediation and soil contamination prevention. Judging by the feedback received from Israel and the Netherlands, we can look forward to increased cooperation between our two countries in the important area of environmental protection.

I especially would like to welcome the delegation from the Netherlands whose participation today was organized by the umbrella organization NVRD in association with the Netherlands Embassy. The NVRD is the association for Waste and Cleansing in the Netherlands. I have no doubt that this seminar will allow the Dutch participants to get acquainted with waste problems in Israel and offer practical and cost efficient solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

No one likes to think about waste. We find it easier to throw away garbage and debris into the trash can without giving it another thought. Once the municipality takes it away, it is of no further concern to us. The person on the street, if asked, seems blissfully unaware of what happens to the rubbish that he or she has just thrown away. Occasionally we get to see the municipality's garbage truck, heading towards no one knows where. Out of sight, out of mind.

But how long can we simply dump trash in a container and forget about it? The transport of waste is becoming more and more expensive and this problem is being aggravated even more so by growing populations and higher standards of living. Unlike the nuclear waste disposal problem, about which scientists and planners knew in advance, the household garbage dilemma has been building up; slowly we are drowning in our own waste.

We talk about acid rain, polluted water, and depletion of the protective ozone layer. But trash disposal has been largely overlooked. Very few people were concerned about the problem until polythene bags and other non-biodegradable wastes started piling up in the already over-filled landfills.

Fortunately Dutch waste policy is now tackling the problem of landfills. We are actively moving from a sector-based approach to a full-chain approach. The sector-based approach focuses on the end of product chains: the waste stage. This new policy has been highly successful: today, only a small portion of Dutch waste is dumped in landfills. More than 80% is put to good use. And the volume of waste per household stopped growing some time ago. It is important to maintain past successes as we move forward.

Landfills also present us with a more serious problem in that they emit a harmful greenhouse gas called methane. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change currently estimates that around 2% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions are caused by landfills. In affluent countries that rely primarily on landfills as their primary waste management solution, landfill methane emissions can amount to 5%–6% of the greenhouse gas emissions.

The Netherlands has come a long way in dealing with these emissions. For example, methane emissions from waste disposal sites are being reduced and the energy generated by waste incineration plants is used to produce heat and electricity more frequently. There is still a lot to be done but we are on the right track.

Construction waste management is another sector where the Netherlands has a lot to offer. The bad news is that we are number one in Europe for producing building- and demolition waste with 1.500 kilograms per head of the population per year. The good news is that more than 95% of all building- and demolition waste in the Netherlands is recycled. This aspect will be presented at this seminar.

Undoubtedly the technologies and solutions presented today will provide companies and authorities that are present here today with the means to tackle the growing problem of waste in Israel. The equipment presented for waste treatment is in accordance with strict emission guidelines and can therefore be used in Israel and for that matter anywhere in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, every day the impact of our actions is painfully visible. I think we are well aware of the challenges lying ahead of us. And we know we need each other to confront the issues and find the solutions. We need to take steps from words to action. Not alone, but together. Our message should **NOT** be that economic growth is bad for the environment. Our message should be that the environment requires us to achieve growth in a different way. To deal with waste more cleanly and more efficiently.

As I stated at the beginning of my speech people do not care about garbage or give it a second thought. Let's do everything possible so that waste will be dealt with efficiently in the Netherlands, in Israel and for that matter all around the world. Not only for ourselves but for generations to come.

Thank you