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Unprecedented floods in May last year, for all structures of the Mining Basin "Kolubara", and for the Department for Environmental Protection and Improvement as well, meant the moment after which nothing was the same as before. The newly created, extremely difficult circumstances required almost a complete change of previously planned activities, new priorities and activities, with the need for a huge engagement of all in eliminating the consequences of catastrophic natural disaster which has not been remembered.

Slobodan Radosavljević, PhD, Head of the Department for Environmental Protection and Improvement in MB "Kolubara", stated for company magazine that in mid-2014, in conditions of massive destructions caused by the flood, the department had to make a serious turn in its work and, for the first time since the formation, do the multifaceted reorientation of planned activities and, in compliance with the newly created circumstances, take the most necessary steps.

- That was a real, very serious and a specific situation in which we found ourselves, the moment for the department to demonstrate its competence and abilities or its weaknesses. We made a plan of actions for mitigation and monitoring of environmental impacts during the implementation of the project of pumping out the water and the silt from the open pit mine "Tamnava - West field" and in accordance with the document, fully compliant with the World Bank, which accepted to finance the project, began continuous monitoring of all environmental media, flora and fauna, waste monitoring - explained Radosavljević. - At the same time, all the time we were also learning how to react most rationally to certain unknowns, with which we were confronted almost daily, and thus become logistically involved in the best possible way in activities, not only of the contractors but also of the entire team of "Kolubara", which was operationally involved in the mine "Tamnava - West field".

Plan of actions and monitoring is a very demanding document, as well as the project of pumping out, and during the last year the experts of World Bank came several times on-site so as to make sure that the actions were being implemented. Radosavljevic says that in very complex circumstances in which we have found ourselves for the first time, according to the chief project manager and other members, the department has managed very well.

- We have complied with what has been required of us, and later, based on experiences we have gained, we have provided a more substantial contribution in terms of eco-monitoring. The confirmation of this is that, during the visits of World Bank experts of different profiles, we have not had any remarks. During the last visit, at the end of last year, a very demanding and influential representative of the bank has requested to directly forward video footages from the site to the directors of the bank for Europe so that they can thus personally make

sure how “Kolubara” operates, how much water has been pumped out in the moment of restarting of the coal production at “Tamnava - West field” - Radosavljević says.

Regarding the consequences of floods on local ecosystems and the environment as a whole, our collocutor says that in the field of eco-infrastructure there has been a lot of luck because it has not been damaged much, except for one wastewaters flow meter. We also have good chances of revitalizing it independently and getting it back into use this year with small expert regulation. However, when it comes to the direct impact of the flood wave on the environment, eco-damages are in terms of deposits of the most arable land in the mines “Tamnava” and “Veliki Crljeni” from the area around the river Kolubara upstream and that is a great damage to the ecosystem.

- The flood wave has caught some industrial facilities outside the zone of the mining basin and brought in substances not prescribed by norms for the environment. We have accepted this as a reality and prescribed measures for a reliable relaxation of the complete eco-situation in the document - says Radosavljević. - The quality of the water that is being pumped out has been monitored regularly from the start, and so far there have been no deviations from the envisaged standard, and when the level is reduced to a certain minimum, we will see what the quality of water, soil and silted mass will be, and we will certainly act according to legal regulations.

The Department for Environmental Protection and Improvement has, in the circumstances as they were last year, still managed to implement a number of other, planned activities. Among other things, not a small amount of metal, cardboard and rubber waste has been sold and a significant revenue has been achieved, various types of hazardous waste have been disposed of, two separators of waste oils and fats and six new wastewaters flow meters have been installed.

- Regarding these actions, we have had to adapt to the newly created situation and to the priority of “Kolubara” that Serbia is provided with necessary quantities of coal for the uninterrupted production of electricity. The circumstances do not suit us, so we have installed one of the separators using our own means and resources, starting from designing to the installation itself, of the same quality and according to legal standards as if we engaged a third party to do that by tender - emphasized the Head of the Department for Environmental Protection and Improvement in MB “Kolubara”. - I think this is the path that should be followed in the future as well in terms of improving the environmental protection because in such way, we relax the complete system financially and simultaneously fulfill legal obligations.

In order to raise the level of environmental protection quality, in a large company such as “Kolubara”, one of the key factors is money.

- Firstly, I would like to express gratitude to EPS and MB “Kolubara” on allocating the funds in the revised budget for last year for the environmental protection, which are not small and

with which we have made even a small quality eco-shift, despite the fact that floods have made a tremendous damage – says Radosavljevic. – As for 2015, it is a restrictive year, which will be marked by a struggle for every dinar, for saving every dinar. The funds allocated are at the level of last year, which in this situation is not small at all, and so we will be more cautious with spending. We will not jump into large projects, but we will try to use the money in the best way for the thing that “Kolubara” needs the most at this moment. Simply, we will monitor the system and with strictly earmarked spending of funds, we will enable the system to achieve the main objective and stabilization and to try to reach a production of 31 million tons of lignite.

According to our collocutor, the year 2015 will be a challenging one, which will primarily need expertise, flexibility, adaptability and maximum commitment in order for the system to achieve a qualitative and eco-shift for the better, after great destructions to which it has been subjected.

Equipment decontamination

As Radosavljević says, by freeing of mining equipment from the water embrace, conditions have been created for the beginning of the restoration to working condition. Now, the disinfection of all flooded equipment is being performed and it has already been performed at “Glodar” 1 and “Glodar” 3, there are also two Ashes-1 and 2, belt conveyors, transfer stations, and “Glodar 4” is in preparation as well as the equipment of the “Auxiliary Machinery”. The department has been actively engaged in these activities and is trying to provide a maximum help.

60 illegal landfills

– So far we have registered and mapped the exact locations of about 60 illegal dumps, and those are the larger ones only. We do not want to criticize anyone, but as a socially responsible CE, in cooperation with local authorities and all local communities surrounding the mining basin, we want to talk openly for the first time about this problem and to find a solution acceptable to all – explained the Head of the Department for Environmental Protection.

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