

## AUDIT

# Audit of the management of the contaminated former landfill site in Gamsenried

Federal Office for the Environment, Federal Roads Office

---

## KEY FACTS

The former landfill site in Gamsenried is located between Visp and Brig in the canton of Valais. For several decades, chemical waste was deposited there, mainly by Lonza. Its size and the substances present make it the largest and most complex contaminated site in Switzerland.

The environmental service of the canton of Valais is the authority responsible for implementing the clean-up. Several federal bodies are involved at different levels. These include the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of federal legislation on polluted sites, and the Federal Roads Office (FEDRO), which owns around a third of the polluted land on which the A9 motorway is located. The Federal Office of Transport (FOT), Matterhorn-Gotthard Bahn, SBB and Swissgrid are also involved. The third Rhone correction project, two-thirds of which is subsidised by the Confederation, is indirectly affected.

The size and complexity of the site partly explain why there is currently no overall clean-up project. As a result, neither the clean-up measures, nor the stages, nor the deadlines, nor even the costs are known. The canton of Valais is responsible for ensuring that an overall project is drawn up, and Lonza will have to bear the bulk of the costs as a result of depositing waste there for many years.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the management of the clean-up from the Confederation's point of view. The main finding of this report is the lack of an overall view of the risks and of coordinated monitoring by the various federal bodies involved. Each body is kept informed of the project and acts in accordance with its legal framework only when called upon to do so. This approach does not allow for coordinated and concerted action to be taken by the Confederation.

### No overview of risks and no active monitoring at federal level

Given the importance, scale and duration of the clean-up, as well as the direct and indirect costs for the Confederation, an overview and monitoring at federal level are essential. The SFAO recommends that the General Secretariat of the Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications carry out an overall risk analysis, taking into account the interfaces with the A9 and the Rhone correction and, on this basis, draw up a monitoring concept with clearly defined responsibilities. The aim is to defend the Confederation's interests actively and holistically, while keeping its financial involvement to a minimum.

So far, the FOEN has taken a back seat in the project. The fact that its financial risk is considered to be low, due to the non-use of the federal OCRCS fund, should not overshadow other risks, such as those to the environment and to the Confederation's reputation. The FOEN will have to adapt its supervision in line with the overall analysis of the risks to the Confederation.

### After several postponements, construction of a watertight wall should start soon

The SFAO also examined the project to build a watertight wall. This first measure will be implemented at a cost of around CHF 53 million. The project consists of an underground wall some thirty metres deep. It should improve the hydraulic insulation of the former landfill site and prevent pollution from spreading further outside the site. The planned course of this watertight wall runs along the A9 motorway for around a kilometre. The distribution of costs was set out in an agreement signed at the end of 2024 between the FEDRO, the Canton of Valais, Lonza and the commune of Brig-Glis. The FEDRO will cover costs of around CHF 2.3 million, mainly for traffic management during the works.

To date, the FEDRO has been appropriately involved in this project. It must ensure that it continues to play an active part in strategic decisions, while ensuring a clear division of responsibilities. For the next stages of the clean-up, the SFAO notes that FEDRO must proactively take all necessary steps to ensure that its financial involvement is kept to a strict minimum.