



Success Story: Raising the Alarm on Hazardous Waste in the Aftermath of the Beirut Port Explosion

On August 4, 2020, a tragic explosion rocked Beirut's port area, causing city-wide devastation, and generating massive amounts of construction and demolition waste. The five-year, \$15 million USAID Diverting Waste by Encouraging Reuse and Recycling (DAWERR) Activity, which is implemented by ECODIT, stepped in to help USAID with various aspects of waste management in the wake of the explosion.

One of these initiatives ended up saving lives. DAWERR completed a rapid analysis of the shattered glass resulting from the explosion, which assessed whether the waste stored at the Bakalian site in Quarantina, specifically the collected glass, could be recovered. During the assessment and based on visual inspection, the team noticed that there could be an accumulation of asbestos-containing waste commingled with other debris in the waste piles. Asbestos, a known human carcinogen, could present serious public health hazards to people living near the rubble storage site.



In response, the DAWERR Activity initiated a rapid assessment for asbestos management and collected and analyzed 12 samples from several waste piles in Bakalian area, including the glass pile. Test results conducted in a specialized laboratory in Canada confirmed the contamination of the collected samples with asbestos fibers.

The DAWERR Activity team immediately informed the Ministry of Environment, local partners, and civil society organizations working on the site and recommended the halting of ongoing sorting operations and the development of a remediation and management plan to prevent a major health catastrophe.

UNDP Energy and Environment Program Manager Jihan Seoud commended USAID and the DAWERR Activity on the rapid response, consistent follow-ups, and extreme scrutiny, saying, "The fact that DAWERR undertook the chemical test analysis was very important and allowed us to elevate the concern to another level because it proved the major public health hazards." She also added that, "as a result, UNDP prepared asbestos-related awareness material with UNEP and circulated them to all the UN teams and NGOs working on the ground." These post-explosion interventions align with USAID's efforts to introduce sustainable solid waste solutions in Lebanon.

USAID Diverting Waste by Encouraging Reuse and Recycling Activity Overview

Period of Performance: August 2020 – July 2025

Value: \$15 million

Client: United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

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