Sewage across borders

The head of the Eshkol Council, Chaim Yellin, has a revolutionary idea: to build facilities in the council area to treat the Gaza Strip sewage

The goal is twofold: both an environmental and agricultural solution

Oded Ben-Meir, Yedioth HaNegev [Negev local weekly], May 15

Sewage, as we know, does not respect borders. The sewage system in the Gaza Strip, which is on the brink of collapse, as well as the sewage flowing from the Hebron area in Judea and Samaria, constitute an environmental hazard not only for the residents of the Palestinian Authority but also for the residents of the Negev.

An unusual proposal for a possible solution to the sewage problem in the Gaza Strip was raised on the weekend by the head of the Eshkol Regional Council, Chaim Yellin, at a special conference organized by Friends of the Earth Middle East in the Eshkol Council, to examine cooperation between the PA and Israel to prevent pollution of joint water resources shared by both sides.

Yellin suggests building in the Eshkol Council area along the border fence with the Gaza Strip a number of facilities to treat sewage from the Gaza Strip, with the PA financing the treatment of the millions of cubic meters of sewage treated in the facilities. The treated sewage water would be used, according to the proposal, to irrigate the agricultural land in the area.

"The sewage reserves in the Gaza Strip have not been treated for a long time," Yellin told Yedioth HaNegev. "The World Bank and the Palestinian Authority are having difficulty with recruiting investors and donors to build sewage treatment facilities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Furthermore, Israel, for various reasons, is not approving the construction of such treatment facilities nor allowing the passage of raw materials to build them, so that the sewage systems in the PA are gradually collapsing. I am not willing to help build infrastructures for an entity that does not recognize Israel's right to exist, but we can help treat sewage from the Gaza Strip in our area, and the treated water can serve to expand the agricultural lands in the area. Thereby we can solve the PA sanitation problem on the one hand and ease the water shortage for the area’s farmers on the other hand. We have thrown down the gauntlet. Now the World Bank and the PA have to pick it up."

The issue of the pollution of the water of the Hebron River and the Besor River, that flow through Beersheba and the western Negev, was raised at the conference. According to the drainage authority, construction of a treatment facility for sewage coming from the Hebron area at Shoket Junction is near completion, but if the infusion of toxic sewage and waste from the stone sawmills from the Hebron marble factories continues without preliminary treatment, the new facility will not be able to fulfill its purpose and the filters and precipitation pools will quickly get clogged.

Palestinian participants at the conference said in response that the plan to concentrate the polluting industries in the Hebron area in the C areas near the city was not approved by the civil administration, which they say prevents the separate treatment of the pollution from the tanning and sawmill industries.