

SOIL SEALING

SOILS Focus 1

Sealed surfaces are artificialised surfaces that prevent water infiltration (roads, alleys, pavements, car parks, buildings, etc.)¹. Soil sealing is a worrying environmental problem, partly because of its irreversible nature over several generations, and partly because of the loss of functions resulting from it.

A soil sealing rate of 7.2% in Wallonia

According to a recent study by the ULB² based on the use of vector data on land cover and land use, the soil sealing rate in Wallonia was 7.2% in 2007, or a sealed area of 121,794 ha. However, this level varied significantly between the Walloon municipalities (from 3.7% to 26.4%). The municipalities with the highest levels were located along the Mouscron-Mons-Charleroi-Namur-Liège-Verviers axis and to the north of it, particularly on the outskirts of Brussels. The southern part of this axis was characterised by lower sealing rates, with the exception of the municipality of Arlon and surrounding municipalities close to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Belgium is one of the most impermeable countries in Europe

Wallonia was less sealed than Flanders, which had a soil sealing rate of 12.9% for the period 2007 - 2009 (study based on land cover data enhanced with field visits)³. The soil sealing rate in Belgium and 37 other European countries has also been assessed by the European Environment Agency, based on a methodology which incorporates satellite imagery⁴. According to this study, Belgium had a sealing rate of 7.18% in 2006, just behind the Netherlands (7.96%) and Malta (13.80%), while the proportion of total surface area of soil sealing for the 38 countries was estimated at 1.85%.

Belgium was therefore ranked among the countries with a high level of soil sealing (> 3%), a rate which is in line with its high population density.

No binding targets to combat soil sealing

Limiting soil sealing requires limiting land take⁵. Where this is not possible, already artificialised soils should be remobilised as a matter of priority, rather than new land. The effects of soil sealing can be mitigated by measures such as the use of permeable materials, green infrastructure and natural water recovery systems⁶. The European Commission has called on Member States to take measures to limit soil sealing. In particular, it recommended, through the Roadmap to a Resources Efficient Europe⁷, that the "no net land take"⁸ be achieved by 2050, and invited national authorities to set binding targets with regard to land cover⁹.

[1] According to Weng, 2012 | [2] ULB - IGEAT - ANAGÉO, 2015 | [3] VMM - ALMC - MIRA, 2013 | [4] EEA, 2016 | [5] → TERRIT 2 | [6] EC, 2012 | [7] COM (2011) 571 | [8] → TERRIT 1 | [9] EC, 2013

Map 41 Soil sealing

