

## **€2.5million project aims to develop sustainable soils from construction waste**

Waste from the construction industry could provide a safe and sustainable source of healthy soils thanks to a new cross-Channel research project.

The €2.5million ReCon Soil project, supported by €1.8million from the European Regional Development Fund via the Interreg France (Channel) England programme, starts in April and will run until June 2023.

It brings together scientists, industry and educators to revolutionise how waste material from construction projects is managed, both from a scientific and regulatory perspective.

The project aims to halt the amounts being paid by the industry to dispose of waste soil from building sites across the UK and France – currently estimated at more than €3.5billion per annum – while contributing to food security, agricultural sustainability and reduced carbon emissions.

ReCon Soil is being led by researchers at the University of Plymouth (UK), who have extensive experience in the development of reconstructed soils and the wider physical and social impacts of soil erosion and degradation.

Working with a range of partners in the UK and France, they will develop and roll out at least three new soil recipes made from locally-sourced construction waste and agricultural by-products.

These recipes will initially be thoroughly investigated in laboratories in Plymouth, and then at sites in the UK and France, to monitor their effectiveness and potential environmental impact.

The data from those studies will then be incorporated into blueprints detailing when and where the soils can be deployed, and any amendments needed to ensure their effective deployment.

It will also establish five new low-carbon technology networks – with members from the construction, agricultural, conservation, and public sectors – and train 200 workers, helping to take reconstructed soils from research to commercialisation.

The project will also explore the current policy barriers and regulatory impediments that would need to be addressed for the practice to be rolled out right across the construction sector.

The project aligns with the UK Government's 25-Year Environment Plan, which calls for improvements in the approach to soil management and states that, by 2030, all of England's soils should be managed sustainably.

Mark Fitzsimons, Professor of Environmental Chemistry at the University of Plymouth and the project's Principal Investigator, said: *"The world is hugely reliant on good quality soils for food security and their ability to store carbon. However, soils are under both human and climate pressures which means there is a need to develop resilient and sustainable alternatives. Human intervention to sustain and improve soil was an ancient practice in the Amazon Basin and reconstructed soils can*

*unquestionably be part of future solutions to soil health and climate mitigation. This project offers the exciting prospect of focussing the scientific and practical expertise of the project team to develop healthy soils and enable this process to be rolled out in the UK, France and beyond.”*

Carolyn Reid, Programme Manager, Interreg France (Channel) England programme, added:

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

The ReCon Soil project has a total budget of €2.5m, of which €1.8m is funded by the European Regional Development Fund via the Interreg France (Channel) England Programme.

The partner organisations involved in the project are:

- UK: University of Plymouth; CL:AIRE UK; Eden Project Learning; University of East Anglia.
- France: Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières, Normandie; Comité d'Action Technique et Economique, Bretagne; Université Le Havre Normandie.

For more information about this news release, contact University of Plymouth Media & Communications Officer Alan Williams on 01752 588004 or email [alan.williams@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:alan.williams@plymouth.ac.uk).

### **About the University of Plymouth**

The University of Plymouth is renowned for high quality, internationally-leading education, research and innovation.

With a mission to Advance Knowledge and Transform Lives, Plymouth is a \*top 50 research university with clusters of world class research across a wide range of disciplines including marine science and engineering, medicine, cybersecurity and psychology. A three-time winner of the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education, most recently in 2020 in respect of its pioneering research on microplastics pollution in the oceans and its impact on the environment and changing behaviour, the University continues to grow in stature and reputation.

It has a strong track record for teaching and learning excellence, and has one of the highest numbers of National Teaching Fellows of any UK university. With over 19,000 students, and a further 9,500 studying for a Plymouth degree at partner institutions in the UK and around the world, and over 135,000 alumni pursuing their chosen careers globally, it has a growing global presence.

<http://www.plymouth.ac.uk>

\* Research Fortnight Research Power League Table 2014.

### **About the Interreg FCE program**

Interreg France (Channel) England (FCE) is an EU programme set up to foster economic development in the south of the UK and north of France by funding innovative projects which have a sustainable and economic benefit.

It focuses on a range of specific objectives including supporting innovation, improving the attractiveness of the FCE area and developing low carbon technologies.

More information: [www.channelmanche.com](http://www.channelmanche.com)