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# Sustainable construction faces hurdle

Imports of non-regulated materials are being used freely on all types of buildings, Medma says

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Construction waste generated by demolition is dumped in open spaces around Dubai. The workers try to separate metal from concrete and later the metal is sold and the concrete is abandoned.

Image Credit: Francois Nel /Gulf News archive

Dubai Unregulated building materials are being brought into the country due to a lack of monitoring and testing,

hampering sustainable construction, the head of a materials association has said.

Ferdinand Leopolder, executive director of the Middle East Drymix Mortar Association (Medma) described the imports of sustainable construction here as the 'wild west' with non-regulated materials being used freely on all types of buildings.

"We are speaking about mortars specifically, which means the wall coverings or ceiling panels. Basically the decorative elements that usually catch your eye first," said Leopolder on the sidelines of the Middle East Conference on Sustainable Building Materials last week.

Cracks visible in the mortar of homes and malls are frequent and are not representative of sustainable construction, said Leopolder. "Sustainability is not just about materials that are ecological, it's about materials that last more than 15 years. Sustainable materials have to be of the best quality," he said.

### **Curbing imports**

Medma signed a memorandum of understanding with Dubai Central Laboratory (DCL) to curb the imports of unsatisfactory materials that shorten a building's lifespan, and to review standards and adapt specific regulations for the climate and workmanship common in the UAE.

In the 'boom years' around 11 million tonnes of construction waste was produced annually according to Emirates Recycling, dedicated to the recycling and recovery of Dubai's construction and demolition waste. Today around 20 per cent of that is produced, which is still considerable. "Our main target is to establish a mortar lab and train the personnel at DCL in order to

create a firm basis for neutral testing and standards development in the GCC area," said Leopolder.

Under the agreement, Medma with DCL will start a legislative initiative to make testing of mortars according to choice standards mandatory for all materials within Dubai Municipality, after an initial training period for the lab staff of about 12 months.

A construction consultant who did not wish to be named welcomed the move but highlighted that more training of workers was also necessary and would be beneficial to buildings here.

"Labourers mostly receive their training on the job and cheap materials are brought in to build towers quickly to meet demand, so it's really not surprising that the buildings have to be torn down after 15 years," he said.

"Slowly things are turning and quality is being given more thought because they have higher value."