

Paris, June 8, 2021

SUEZ inaugurates its “BioResourceLab” in Narbonne (France):

The new international research and innovation center dedicated to the recovery of organic waste

Today, Tuesday, June 8, 2021, Jean-Marc Boursier, Group Senior Executive Vice President in charge of the France region and Operations, and Xavier Litrico, Group Chief Research & Science Officer are inaugurating the “BioResourceLab” with Didier Mouly, the Mayor of Narbonne and President of the Grand Narbonne Municipality, and Guillaume Héras, 1st Vice-President of the Grand Narbonne Municipality in charge of Human Resources and Social Relations and the management and recovery of waste and the circular economy. This new SUEZ Group international research and innovation center dedicated to the transformation of organic waste into¹ bioresources will bring concrete solutions to the demographic, climatic and resource scarcity challenges.

Located at the heart of the Occitanie region in the South of France, within the SUEZ/Grand Narbonne ecohub, this 1,000 m² research laboratory dedicated to the study of organic waste and the improvement of recovery techniques required two years of work and an investment of €5 million.

Waste recovery, an environmental challenge

According to the World Bank, by 2050, the amount of waste generated by our planet will increase by 70%² compared with 2016. Regulatory policies and actors of the civil society are driving forward changes in waste management in order to promote waste reduction and recovery. For example, by 2023, separate collection of food waste will become obligatory within the European Union (EU)³. This generalized sorting should limit the environmental impacts of waste landfills and to achieve the European waste landfill reduction targets⁴. In the same dynamic, France’s Action Plan for the Circular Economy (*Plan d’Action pour l’Economie Circulaire*)⁵ requires new solutions to increase the amount of recovered flows, for example regarding waste paper and cardboard, which are often of poor quality for current paper recycling channels.

Organic waste recovery, an opportunity for the environment

Organic waste is a prime resource that can be reintegrated into production and use cycles for new goods. Renewable, their transformation into materials and molecules makes it possible to substitute them for carbon-based fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas, thereby contributing to the protection of resources, the development of renewable energies

¹ Organic waste includes green waste from parks and gardens, food waste, residues from agriculture and the agri-food industries, paper, card and wood waste as well as sludge generated from the treatment of wastewater.

² 3.4 billion tons of waste in 2050, according to the World Bank report of September 20, 2018 “What A Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050.”

³ European Directive 2018/851 from the European Parliament and Council of May 30, 2018, modifying Directive 2008/98/EC relative to waste management.

⁴ The European Directive 2018/850 amends the Directive 1999/31/EC to reduce landfill for recoverable waste and to limit the portion of food and similar waste to 10% of landfill waste by 2035.

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0098&from=EN>

and the incorporation of biofuels in order to limit the impact on the climate. Furthermore, their conversion into compost and other soil amendment products fights against soil depletion and erosion⁶, and against climate change, by storing carbon over the long term⁷. Lastly, production of organic and alternative fertilizers from organic matter limits the use of petrochemical and mineral fertilizers, a key challenge identified in the recent European regulation on fertilizers⁸. The residual origin of these renewable materials is an additional advantage: their reuse, recycling and recovery limits consumption of the biosphere which generates all these bioresources, thereby favoring the use of arable land to produce food.

In this context, the BioResourceLab aims to improve existing treatment solutions and technologies, and to explore new ways of recovering organic waste to produce bioenergies, biofuels, biomaterials, alternative fertilizers and molecules for green chemistry. Providing new innovative solutions to produce new resources on a territorial scale will help to preserve the environment and accelerate the transition to a virtuous circular economy.

This new knowledge of organic waste as bioresources will be developed in partnership with academic institutes for teaching and research, in particular with INRAE (the French National Institute for Research in Agriculture, Food and the Environment and its Biotechnology and Environmental Laboratory located in Narbonne). Collaborations will also be set up with start-ups and technology suppliers to test and develop innovative solutions.

Under the direction of Marion Crest, the BioResourceLab team of about 15 employees, will be able to expand, according to the projects carried out. Researchers, engineers, technicians and PhD students, specialized in microbiology, biotechnology, agronomy and chemistry will conduct experimental tests at different scales, ranging from lab testing, to pilot programs, larger-scale projects, and industrial sites. Their expertise will be mobilized to serve the technical excellence of the solutions provided by the SUEZ Group to its public and private sector customers. The BioResourceLab will share the knowledge acquired with the scientific, institutional and normative communities, and could provide theoretical and operational training, in particular with the SupAgro Montpellier agricultural institute and the Universities of Montpellier and Perpignan.

Jean-Marc Boursier, SUEZ Group Senior Executive Vice President in charge of the France region and Operations: "Innovation has always been in the DNA of SUEZ and will remain so in the future. Integrated within the CIRSEE, (the Paris-based International Water and Environmental Research Center), the BioResourceLab is the Group's first research center with an international dimension, dedicated to the recovery of organic waste. Located at the heart of the SUEZ/Grand Narbonne Ecohub, the BioResourceLab benefits from an ecosystem that favors its innovation activities and the creation of world-leading centers of excellence. These perspectives are very exciting because they will allow us to support the Group and its customers in developing innovative solutions for preserving the environment."

Research & Development at SUEZ Group:

- €120m invested in R&D each year
- 8 R&D centers
- 9 laboratories and expertise centers
- 650 R&D experts and researchers

⁶ According to the European Environment Agency (AEE, 2010), soil depletion involves more than 100 million hectares in Europe, i.e., 16% of the European territory. 45% of the European territory contains only small amounts of organic material, which is a key indicator of soil quality.

⁷ The "4 for 1000" international initiative, launched by France on December 1, 2015, at the COP 21 climate summit, involved bringing together both public and private players committed to developing research and implementing practices to promote the crucial role of soil as regards food safety and climate change. Indeed, 0.4% annual growth in carbon stored in the top 30-40 cm of soil significantly reduces in the atmosphere the concentration of CO₂ linked to human activities. <https://4p1000.org>

⁸ European regulation 2019/1009 from the European Parliament and Council of June 5, 2019, defining rules relative to the marketing authorization in the EU, amending regulations (EC) No. 1069/2009 and (EC) No. 1107/2009 and repealing regulation (EC) No. 2003/2003.

Key figures for SUEZ in the Occitanie Region

- 1,700 employees
- 700,000 people benefiting from waste collection services
- 2.8 million people benefiting from waste treatment tools
- 535,000 tons of waste recovered
- 208,000 MWh produced i.e., electricity to serve 36,945 households
- 820,000 inhabitants provided with drinking water
- 200,000 smart meters
- 2.3 million inhabitants benefiting from collective sanitation services



The BioResourceLab, SUEZ Group's new international research and innovation center dedicated to the recovery of organic waste, located in Narbonne, in the South of France - © Frédéric Ferra

Contacts:

Isabelle Herrier-Naufle / Elodie Vandevoorde

+33 (0)6 83 54 89 62 / +33 (0)6 78 36 19 52

isabelle.herrier.naufle@suez.com

elodie.vandevoorde@suez.com

Twitter: [@suez](https://twitter.com/suez)

About SUEZ:

Since the end of the 19th century, SUEZ has built expertise aimed at helping people to constantly improve their quality of life by protecting their health and supporting economic growth. With an active presence on five continents, SUEZ and its 90,000 employees strive to preserve our environment's natural capital: water, soil, and air. SUEZ provides innovative and resilient solutions in water management, waste recovery, site remediation and air treatment, optimizing municipalities' and industries' resource management through "smart" cities and improving their environmental and economic performance. The Group delivers sanitation services to 64 million people and produces 7.1 billion m³ of drinking water. SUEZ is also a contributor to economic growth, with more than 200,000 jobs created directly and indirectly on an annual basis, and a provider of new resources, with 4.2 million tons of secondary raw materials produced. By 2030, the Group is targeting 100% sustainable solutions, with a positive impact on our environment, health and climate. SUEZ generated total revenue of €17,2 billion in 2020.

Find out more about the SUEZ Group
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SUEZ

Head Office: Tour CB21 - 16, Place de l'Iris, 92040 Paris La Défense Cedex, France - Tel: +33 (0)1 58 81 20 00 - www.suez.com

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