

WASTE: A DEVELOPING ENERGY RESOURCE - VIEIRA DE ALMEIDA

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“Spanish companies find the US increasingly attractive using their expertise in infrastructure to secure concessions.”

Luis Riesgo, Jones Day, Madrid

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The use of waste as a potential energy source is on the increase, accounting for around 4% of Portugal's total renewable energy supply, but any debate around further investments in waste to energy (WTE) facilities must take into account the issues that surround any new resource, says Vanda Cascão, energy partner at Lisbon's Vieira de Almeida.

'El uso de instalaciones de residuos energéticos va en aumento, pero cualquier debate acerca del aumento en las inversiones debe tener en cuenta los problemas que rodean cualquier nuevo recurso,' dice Vanda Cascão, Socia de Energía en Vieira de Almeida en Lisboa

Home and industrial waste present an attractive potential energy source as despite efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle it continues to be generated, she notes. WTE plants not only generate a useful by-product but also help reduce landfill and may reduce lengthy transportation needs, which also helps cut total CO2 emissions.

In addition, the ability also to use agricultural and forestry waste and residues offers further sustainable supplies while also bringing energy diversification, all of which contribute to national competitiveness.

'Waste as an alternative energy resource offers clear benefits. But what is important also is a clear and practical regulatory framework as well as an attractive feed-in tariff to encourage developments.'

The Portuguese government, she says, is committed to exploring the potential for WTE developments as part of its ongoing EU energy diversification targets as well as commitments to reducing carbon emissions under the Kyoto Protocols.

'I am optimistic about the potential of WTE but it is important in the current economic climate that energy projects (and not only of WTE) are not limited because of financing or regulatory concerns – momentum must be maintained to ensure that we do not face energy supply gaps further down the line.'

With less than a handful of WTE plants currently operational in Portugal there clearly remains much to be done.