

# 'Queen of Trash' in dock in Sweden's biggest toxic waste scandal

AFP- Eleven people go on trial in Sweden on Tuesday accused of illegally dumping toxic waste in the country's biggest-ever environmental crime case.

A once-acclaimed waste management company is accused of dumping or burying some 200,000 tonnes of waste from the Stockholm area at 21 sites, with no intention of processing it correctly.

Among those charged with "aggravated environmental crime" is its former chief executive Bella Nilsson, an ex-stripper who once called herself the "Queen of Trash".

High levels of PCBs, lead, mercury, arsenic and other chemicals were released into the air, soil and water, prosecutors said, endangering the "health of humans, animals and plant life".

They say the now-bankrupt NMT Think Pink "collected waste with no intention or ability to handle it in line with environmental legislation."

The waste consisted of everything from building materials to electronics, metals, plastics, wood, tyres and toys.

Think Pink left the piles "unsorted" and abandoned, according to the charge sheet.

Nilsson's ex-husband Thomas, the company's founder, and Leif Ivan Karlsson, an eccentric entrepreneur who starred in a reality show about his over-the-top lifestyle, are also among those indicted, along with "waste broker" Robert Silversten.

An environmental consultant who helped the company pass inspections, Magnus Karlsson, has been charged as an accessory.

All 11 accused have denied committing any crime.

In its heyday from 2018 to 2020, the company's fuschia-coloured construction waste sacks could be seen on many a Stockholm sidewalk, and the company twice won a prestigious Swedish business prize.

– Burning dumps –

Think Pink was hired by municipalities, construction companies, apartment co-ops and private individuals to recycle and dispose of building waste.

But the business came crashing down in 2020 when its owners were arrested.

Bella Nilsson – who has now changed her name to Fariba Vancor – has previously told Swedish media that the company acted in line with the law, and insisted she is the victim of a plot by business rivals.

“She has an explanation for all of this,” her lawyer Jan Tibbling told the Dagens Nyheter daily on Monday.

Considered Sweden's largest environmental crime case, the police investigation runs to more than 45,000 pages, with 150 witnesses due to testify.

One prosecutor, Linda Schon, told Dagens Nyheter that they had to limit the charges to 21 sites because they were running out of time.

“There may have been a number of sites we haven't been able to investigate,” but “we believe that 21 sites is enough to show that the crimes were systematic,” she said.

Several municipalities have sought damages for clean-up and decontamination costs, totalling 260 million kronor (\$25.4 million).

One of the biggest claims is from the Botkyrka council, where two Think Pink waste piles burned for months in 2020 and 2021 after spontaneously combusting. One was near two nature reserves.

The trial, which begins at 09:30 am local time (0730 GMT) is expected to last until May 2025.

AFP