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“I’ve been flooded five times”

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✖ **Vito Tioli**, the owner of a company that does chrome-plating of plastic materials, can consider himself the “doyen of flood victims”; his firm, in Gornate Olona, has been flooded no fewer than five times: in 1992, in 1995, twice in 2000, and in 2002.

And so, he is the best person to say what happens to a businessman who suffers this kind of damage.

You have been “flooded” five times.

“That’s right. The worst was in 1992, when we had 1.10m of water, with 25cm of mud throughout the factory and in the courtyard. In total, there was 880 million lire of damage, of which 10% was recognised.”

Eighty eight million lire, out of 880 million?

“Yes. And this money didn’t arrive until 1998, six years later. As a result, I included the sum in my income declaration as contingent assets, and it was taxed at 50%.

Of course, in the meantime no one has dreamed of suspending our tax payments, so we’ve continued to pay.”

On these five occasions, how often did you receive aid?

“As I said, for the first time in 1992, the famous ten percent. Then in 1995, I received a larger amount, 35% of the overall damage. The mechanism worked perfectly: the funds went to the prefect at the time, who distributed them quickly and effectively, under the control of the associations. It was a great job done well. Then, no more”

So, how do you pick yourself up, after the damage?

“You have to do the best you can, alone: you ask for funding and try to delay payments a bit. I’m still paying now, for example.”

How much did the damage come to?

“The total damage I suffered came to about 2 billion 300 million lire (about €1.2 million, *ed.*). The first time, I received about 88 million lire, the second time, a bit more, considering that the damage was about 850 million lire, and I received 35%. And, for the second time, I had been more prudent, I’d insured myself: so, in addition to the 35%, I received about 200 million lire from the insurance company. It was a great relief, and a great help for starting up again. But there was a problem; the insurance company decided not to insure me any more. Or rather, the following year, they raised the premium so much that I had to refuse. So I took my luck, I haven’t insured myself again since, hoping that the floods won’t be so bad.”

Have you never thought of moving your factory?

“Why should I? There have always been factories here, the river is a friend of the factories. The river became an enemy, when they started doing stupid things to the land. When it comes to floods, it’s very important who manages the land and the planning permissions.”

What did you actually have to do?

“Immediately afterwards, I had to safeguard the more sensitive production areas: for example, everything has been raised up, to prevent any electrical hazards. Then, 20 people worked for about a month to remove 4800 tons of mud, and after that, I cleaned out the drains. Because of this, production was halted for about a month, but my employees worked the whole month, and so, were duly paid.

At that point, we started production again; in order to do this, I asked my creditors for a 60-90-day extension. They all agreed, they were very understanding about what had happened to me. It wasn’t the same for the banks, though; immediately after the flood, they tried to reduce the overdraft and loans I had with them. On that occasion, I had a terrible argument with one of the bank managers I worked with. I was on the point of ending all relations with that bank, but then it didn’t happen; in fact, in 1995, that bank manager was the first to call and ask me if I needed to increase my bank cover ... With the reluctance on the part of the banks, I turned to the loan association “Confidi”, and got a better response there. I obtained considerable funding and was able to come back to work with it. Because, in these cases, what’s important is to have enough money at the right time, quickly. The problem at these times is liquidity, being able to count immediately on resources.”

And what about you costumers? How did they respond to your delivering late?

“Well: they were patient, but, in fact, they couldn’t have done anything else. However, on the first occasion, the delay was one month, on the second, it was 15 days, and the third, 10: so, we’ve got better ...”

You haven’t had any more damage since 2002, touch wood.

“I have to say that the work done on the Olona River over these years has helped; especially the widening that was done downstream, between Legnano and Castellanza, I think this has been very important. There have been times when we reached danger levels, but there’s been no more flooding. When the dam was opened, the matter seemed to have been resolved permanently. It was a good thing, but they took 20 years to do it; in the mean time, what happened, happened. And now, I get the impression the same is happening to the people in Venice.”

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redazione@varesenews.it