



3R Portfolio **- Good Practices to Promote the 3Rs -**

European Commission

Major Activities

The EU is fully engaged into developing Sustainable Production and Consumption. This provides an umbrella under which actions promoting the 3Rs are included. This contribution focuses on existing measures promoting waste reduction, reuse and recycling and briefly mentions other related measures and presents the ongoing EU policy development which is integrating resource, product and waste policies.

Waste policy is a competency shared by the European Union and its 25 Member States. European waste policy and legislation sets the framework within which the 25 EU Member States develop their national policies. EU legislation is enacted in areas where action is more efficient if the measures are taken at European level. It is important to note that because of the risks related to waste management, EU policy measures to promote reduction, reuse and recovery of waste are taken in the context of measures ensuring that waste treatment takes place in sound conditions.

1. General measures to promote environmentally sound reduction, reuse and recycling of waste set in European waste legislation:

- The basic priorities of waste management are first waste prevention, secondly waste recovery (recycling and energy recovery - in the EU energy recovery is not considered to be recycling but to be recovery), and thirdly sound final disposal. These priorities must be promoted by the Member States;
- Waste treatment must not adversely affect human health or the environment. Best Available Techniques is the legal reference for recycling of hazardous waste. Landfill and incineration are regulated by law;
- Shipments of waste must be controlled if they display risks – low risk materials flow freely throughout the EU while high risk wastes are subject to stringent control procedures. Export of hazardous waste from the EU is restricted to avoid exporting environmental burdens.

2. Measures to promote the reduction, reuse and recycling of specific waste streams set in European waste legislation:

- Recycling and recovery targets have been set for the following categories of wastes:
Packaging waste: 60% recycling by 2008
End-of-life vehicles: 80% reuse or recycling and 85 % recovery by 2006 and 85% reuse or recycling and by 95 % recovery by 2006
Waste electrical and electronic equipment: 50 to 80% recycling and recovery depending on the recycling and recovery potential of the category of equipment by 2008;
- Reduction of municipal biodegradable waste landfilled by 65% to be reached by 2016;
- Landfill of tyres is banned from 2006;

- Hazardous substances are being banned from packaging, end-of-life vehicles and waste electrical and electronic equipment.

4. Developing a new policy framework for resource use, products and waste:

With the adoption of the sixth Community Environment Action Programme (6EAP) in July 2002 (Decision 1600/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council) the European Union has entered into a new phase of policy development in the areas of resource use, products and waste. The 6EAP establishes a clear link between these policies because they all affect the life-cycle of resources. These policies need to be integrated to ensure that net environmental benefits are achieved.

4.1 New approach to product policy: an Integrated Product Policy (IPP)

- IPP aims to reduce the environmental impact of products throughout their life-cycle taking into account economic and social impacts. IPP encourages the co-operation of stakeholders in this process and the use of a variety of policy instruments to achieve this.
- IPP is implemented following two approaches:
 - Policy Specific Approach: establishing the framework conditions for the environmental improvement of products by using different policy tools.
 - Product Specific Approach: identifying the products with the greatest potential of environmental improvement, running pilot projects to demonstrate the practical application of the IPP approach.
- A handbook on Green Public Procurement has been produced to give guidance to public purchasers and corporate purchasers how to buy green.
- European environmental management and eco-labelling schemes have been established and are under review.

A framework is being adopted on the EU level to set eco-design requirements for energy using products. This will allow product specific legislative measures to be taken but also leaves room for self regulation by the industry if it is likely to deliver the policy objectives faster and with greater cost effectiveness.

4.2 New approach to resource policy

The 6EAP demands the adoption of a Thematic Strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources (Resource Strategy). The strategy is being prepared by the European Commission and will be presented to the Council and the European Parliament during 2005.

The objective of the strategy is to reduce environmental impacts in a growing economy. This requires breaking the link between natural resource use and negative environmental impacts. In practical terms this means reducing the environmental impacts per unit of resource use and improving resource productivity.

In tracing environmental impacts it is necessary to develop an understanding of impacts throughout the use phases of resources – how we use materials and energy throughout product life cycles is often referred to as the *cradle to grave* approach. It is not sufficient to look at products or processes in isolation. It is not enough to

just make individual products less environmentally harmful and individual factories cleaner. Rather overall impacts along a causal chain have to be examined in identifying the optimal policy mix.

Environmental problems cannot be dealt with by Europe in isolation. In an era of globalisation, in a world economy in which Europe is an active participant, informed policy making requires knowledge of how resources move through the global economy, what drives this and what the impacts are wherever the resources are used. Each stage of the product cycle, across the globe, needs to be examined.

This is a long-term process – a time horizon of 25 years has been proposed in the strategy. It requires a combination of actions to be taken at different levels of governance. It entails making current policies work better and developing a series of new initiatives.

4.3 New approach to waste policy:

- The thinking of the Resource Strategy is feeding in waste policy. Life-cycle thinking will make it possible to better focus on the environmental benefits of prevention, recycling and develop cost-effective policies;
- Recycling policy will be moving to a new phase where incentives will be developed for the promotion of recycling in general rather than regulating specific wastes;
- Standards will be proposed to support recycling activities;
- Prevention should be promoted by clean technology, improved product design, better informed better informed – corporate as well as private –consumer decisions and action plans

5. An Environmental Technologies Action Plan was adopted in 2004 in order to actively promote eco-innovation and stimulate the uptake of environmental technologies.

The Commission reported in January 2005 on the first year implementation of the Action Plan, and recommended to step-up efforts in the following areas:

- Mobilise financial instruments to share the risks of investing in eco-innovation, both at national and EU level
- Establish performance targets for key products, services and processes
- Prepare an EU system for testing and verifying environmental technologies
- Develop green procurement by public authorities and revise state aid guidelines
- Prepare national roadmaps for implementing ETAP and appropriate indicators at EU level to monitor progress

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