

Senior Officials Meeting on the 3R Initiative
Questionnaire on 3Rs' strategies and activities
Contribution from the European Commission

Introductory note

The EU is fully engaged into developing Sustainable Production and Consumption (SP&C) and The European Commission has announced in December 2005 the elaboration of a European action plan on SP&C.. This provides an umbrella under which actions promoting the 3Rs are included.

This contribution focuses on EU level measures promoting the 3Rs. The EU takes a life cycle approach to activities on the 3Rs integrating policies on resources, products and waste.

EU level policies are complemented by the national policies developed by the 25 EU Member States.

<p>1. Major developments at European Union level regarding the strategies, policies and activities on the 3Rs since the Ministerial Conference on the 3Rs (April 2005)</p>

1.1 Adoption of the European Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

The Strategy contained in the Communication from the European Commission of 21 December 2005 entitled “Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources”¹ aims at reducing the negative impacts generated by the use of natural resources in a growing economy, i.e. an absolute decoupling of environmental impacts from economic activities, in a life cycle perspective. To achieve this objective, the Strategy looks at the longer term (25 years) and defines new actions to be taken at EU level in the near future, including:

- The setting-up of an international expert panel on the sustainable use of resources in cooperation with UNEP and other relevant partners and initiatives. This panel will assess and provide scientific information on the environmental issues related to resource use for policy maker worldwide;
- Building detailed knowledge on the environmental impacts associated to resource use with a view to promote better targeting of environmental policies on the major

¹ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/natres/index.htm>

environmental impacts;

- Developing environmental indicators on resource use, including efficiency and productivity indicators and indicators on ecological stress and decoupling of environmental impacts from resource use.

The Strategy also sets-up a European high level forum to facilitate the development of measures and programmes (including targets and monitoring mechanisms) addressing the environmental issues of resource use by the 25 Member States of the European Union. Finally, the Strategy aims to involve the economic sectors to reduce environmental impacts of resource use while ensuring competitiveness.

1.2 Adoption of the European Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste

The Strategy contained in the Communication from the European Commission of 21 December 2006 entitled “Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste”² aims at moving the European Union faster towards a Recycling Society that seeks to avoid waste and uses waste as a resource. This will contribute to improving use of resources and reducing the associated negative environmental impacts. This Strategy will involve a modernization of framework legislation. The major actions envisaged include:

- Reinforced emphasis on waste prevention through complementary EU level and national measures notably by the development of waste prevention programmes by the 25 EU Member States of the European Union;
- Developing further environmental and quality standards for recycled materials and waste management facilities;
- The promotion of the use of economic instruments by the Member States, in particular landfill taxes.

1.3 Adoption of the European Directive on the eco-design of Energy-using Products

The European Directive on the eco-design of Energy-using Products (EuP), such as electrical and electronic devices or heating equipment, provides coherent EU-wide rules for eco-design³. The Directive does not introduce directly binding requirements for specific products, but does define conditions and criteria for setting, through subsequent implementing measures, requirements regarding environmentally relevant product characteristics (such as energy consumption) and allows them to be improved quickly and efficiently.

By encouraging manufacturers to design products with the environmental impacts in mind throughout their entire life cycle, the European Union implements an Integrated Product Policy (IPP) and accelerates the move towards improving the environmental performance of energy-using products. Work is ongoing for the development of

² <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/waste/strategy.htm>

³ http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/eco_design/

implementing measures for 14 product groups.

1.4 Including eco-innovation in public financing of innovation

The EU is developing a financial instrument to support innovation including eco-innovation of enterprises, in particular SMEs, with a view to promote the development of a competitive, innovative and inclusive information society, as well as energy efficiency and new and renewable energy sources.

The proposed Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) puts a strong emphasis on eco-innovation, which is integrated both as a cross-cutting issue and as the subject of specific support measures, including the support to investment funds active in this field, to networks of innovation actors and to pilot and market replication projects.

The CIP aims at contributing to the implementation of the Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP)⁴. It should help the market uptake of innovative techniques and practices in the recycling sector, thus contributing to 3Rs objectives.

2. Domestic 3R activities

2.1 Good practices on 3Rs

Major successful 3R activities at European Union level include:

- Promotion of recycling at all government levels using a mix of instruments;
- Banning of heavy metals from vehicles and electric and electronic equipment;
- Launch of the “European Platform on Life Cycle Assessment”.

Annex 1 gives more details on these good practices.

2.2 3Rs and governance

To promote the 3Rs, it is necessary to fully engage all relevant actors including local authorities, industry and the civil society.

This also implies that policy development must be transparent and appropriate participate of stakeholders is provided for. To these ends the European Union has developed legal instruments implementing the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.⁵ Such measures are key conditions for successful environmental governance.

⁴ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/etap/index.htm>

⁵ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/aarhus/index.htm>

Industry, central and local governments and consumers all have their own responsibilities, for example as regards process and product design, elaboration of policies and consumption choices. 3R policies can only be successful on a large scale with the participation of these actors. National governance systems tailored to the national culture need to be developed that facilitate this taking-up and sharing of responsibilities.

2.3 3Rs and environmentally-sound management of industrial waste

The amounts and the quality of industrial wastes generated are largely dependent on the environmental efficiency of the industrial process. To enhance the environmental efficiency of industrial processes the EU has developed an Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control policy (IPPC). The main instrument of this policy is the IPPC Directive⁶ that implements the concept of best available techniques (BAT). The Directive contains basic rules for integrated permits that must be based on BAT. Guidance on BAT is published by the European Commission based on an exchange of information between experts from government, industry and environmental organizations.⁷

As regards landfills, it is clear in EU law that landfill operators are responsible for the closure and after-care of landfills. Operators must provide a financial security that covers all the costs of the landfill including its closure and after-care. Landfills may be constructed and operated equally by private or public operators. In addition the EU applies the proximity principle to the landfill of waste, i.e. that the waste should be disposed as closely as possible from the place of generation.

3. International 3R policy and strategy

3.1 Situation of transboundary movement of recyclable resources and remanufactured goods

Under EU law hazardous wastes may not be exported from the EU to non-OECD countries, in accordance with the Basel Convention as amended. Non-hazardous waste may be exported for recovery purposes to non-OECD countries in accordance with the control procedure requested by the non-OECD country concerned.⁸

This law solves most of the important negative environment impacts of exports of waste. However, the implementation of this legislation is sometimes hindered because of unclear classification of exported goods or materials, for example that is sometimes, rightly or wrongly, presented as second hand goods or as non-hazardous waste.

⁶ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/ippc/index.htm>

⁷ Guidance documents will cover 30 sectors. Completed documents and draft documents may be found at <http://eippcb.jrc.es/pages/FActivities.htm>.

⁸ See <http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade/issues/global/environment/waste.htm> for details on the control procedures that apply for the various wastes and the various countries of destination.

In addition, to mitigate the environmental pressures arising outside of the EU due to exported non-hazardous recyclable waste the EU requires that the treatment of packaging or electronic and electrical equipment waste can only be accounted to reach EU recycling and recovery targets if this takes place in conditions that are broadly equivalent as in the EU.

3.2 Environmentally-sound management in transboundary movement of recyclable resources and remanufactured goods

The EU has developed a set of regulatory requirements for the shipment and the treatment of waste that ensures a largely levelled playing field from an environmental perspective throughout the Union. This prevents environmental pollution caused by transboundary movement of recyclable resources within the EU and contributes to a sustained increase in trade of recoverable waste within the EU. Major elements of this body of legislation include permitting systems, technical requirements for major waste management processes such as use of waste and landfill of residues, and requiring the application of best available techniques for the bulk of hazardous waste recovery techniques. The latter is documented in the BAT reference document on waste treatment.

The European Commission intends to develop addition guidance on BAT for other operations and quality standards for recycled materials.

The recent years have seen a significant increase in the demand for recyclables such as metals, paper and plastics which export are increasing mainly to Asian countries.

3.3 Harmonisation of economic and environmental benefits through the transboundary movements of recyclable resources and remanufactured goods

Global exchanges of recyclable materials responds to increasing demands for material resources and contributes mitigating the pressures towards high priced resources and positively impacts economic activities, in particular those sectors collecting or using these materials in replacement of increasingly costly virgin materials. Increased value of recyclable materials also stimulates the separation of such materials from waste destined to disposal thereby reducing the amounts incinerated or going to landfill.

In many cases recycling activities are considered to be more labour intensive than the production of virgin materials and create employment opportunities, including in the social economy sector.

The current level of mechanical recycling of metals, paper, glass and plastics in the EU makes a significant contributing to combating climate change. It is estimated to avoid the emission of over 200 million tonnes CO₂ equivalents, i.e. about 5% of total EU emissions of greenhouse gases.

4. Information of respondent

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Annex I: Good practices

No	Name of the practice	Summary of the practice	Impact	Key for success
1	Promotion of recycling, composting and landfill diversion.	<p>All levels of government in the EU have implemented policies promoting recycling, composting, recovery and diversion from landfill.</p> <p>At EU level this includes landfills bans and landfill diversion targets, technical requirements for acceptance of waste in landfills, , recycling and recovery targets and producer responsibility.</p> <p>Key instruments at national and local levels include economic instruments, in particular pay as you throw schemes and landfills taxes. Industry has also contributed on the basis of voluntary action, notably in the area of paper recycling.</p>	<p>Doubling of recycling and composting of municipal waste over 8 years and further increases forecasted.</p> <p>At least 50% of the paper and steel, 43% of glass and 40% of the non-ferrous metal in the EU are currently produced from recycled materials.</p> <p>Utilisation of waste paper for paper production has doubled between 1991 (25%) and 2004 (50%).</p> <p>Reduction of the environmental impacts of landfill, including a 45% decrease of methane emissions from landfills.</p>	<p>Using a mix of instruments that give appropriate economic signals to waste producers and waste managements.</p> <p>Focussing on key environmental impacts and important waste flows.</p>
2	Banning of heavy metals	<p>From July 2003 and July 2006 respectively it is forbidden to market vehicles and electrical and electronic equipment containing heavy metals and certain other hazardous substances (two brominated flame retardants). The use of certain heavy metals is also restricted for packaging and batteries.</p>	<p>Cleaning important waste flows: forecasted reduction of these hazardous substances in future waste arisings, making the waste easier to recycle and less hazardous when it is disposed of.</p>	<p>Application of a substitution policy that allows exemptions for applications for which alternatives are not available or present higher environmental risks. These exemptions are regularly reviewed and subject to public stakeholder consultation.</p>

3	European platform on life cycle assessment	The Platform aims at supporting life cycle thinking in the development of goods and services and in policy making. The Platform is developing life cycle inventory data and life cycle impact assessment factors and will produce a handbook of technical documents for the use of LCA. Information and guidance will be made available on a web portal by 2008.	Cooperative work of stakeholders, government and academia and civil society to develop sound life cycle approaches. Promotion of life cycle thinking in design of processes, products and policies. Improved use of life cycle assessment tools by making validated reference data available and recommending methods for more reliable LCA studies.	Government lead initiative that mobilises stakeholders. Full involvement of stakeholders through consultation, participation, and provision of information. Built-in systematic peer reviewing of information.
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