



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

Environment: Getting gold from garbage – how some Member States are making waste a resource

Brussels, 16 April 2012 - Top performing Member States have recycling rates of up to 70 % and bury virtually nothing, whilst others still landfill more than three-quarters of their waste. How have the best performers turned waste from a problem into a resource? A new report from the European Commission today explains that it is by combining economic instruments. A mix of landfilling and incineration taxes and bans, producer responsibility schemes and pay-as-you-throw prove to be the most effective tools in shifting waste streams to more sustainable paths.. If the EU is to meet the objectives set out in the [Resource Efficiency Roadmap](#) – zero landfilling, maximising recycling and reuse, and limiting energy recovery to non recyclable waste – these economic instruments will need to be introduced more widely across all Member States.

Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said: "*Waste is too valuable to just throw away, and if you manage it right you can put that value back into the economy. Six Member States now combine virtually zero landfilling and high recycling rates. Not only do they exploit the value of the waste, they have created thriving industries and many jobs in the process. This report shows how they achieved it: by making prevention, reuse and recycling more economically attractive through a selection of economic instruments. We now have a common responsibility with the Member States and local authorities to ensure that these instruments are effectively used and spread across the EU. This is one of the central goals of the Resource Efficiency Roadmap.*"

Experience in the Member States shows that a combination of the following instruments is the best way to improve waste management:

- **Landfill and incineration taxes and/or bans** – the results of the study are unequivocal: landfilling and incineration rates have decreased in countries where bans or taxes have driven up costs for landfilling and incineration.
- **"Pay-as-you-throw" schemes** have proved very efficient in preventing waste generation and encouraging citizens to participate in separate waste collection.
- **Producer responsibility schemes** have allowed several Member States to gather and redistribute the funds necessary to improve separate collection and recycling. But cost-efficiency and transparency vary greatly between Member States and between waste streams, so these schemes need careful planning and monitoring.

Significant differences between Member States

There are significant differences in waste management between Member States. According to a Report published by Eurostat on 27 March (see [STAT/12/48](#)), the most advanced six Member States - Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Sweden and The Netherlands - landfill less than 3 % of their municipal waste. At the other extreme, 9 Member States are still landfilling more than 75 % of their municipal waste. Recent statistics published by Eurostat show continuous progress in some new Member States, where recycling rates are increasing rapidly. Municipal waste generation has also decreased in several Member States probably due to the economic downturn.

Economic Instruments needed to reach EU objectives

Replicating these instruments in all Member States will be necessary if the EU is to meet the targets set out in its waste legislation and its targets for resource efficiency. This is why the possibility of making their use legally binding in some cases will be assessed in a 2014 review of EU waste targets. The Commission is also including sound waste management in conditions for receiving certain European funds (see [IP/11/1159](#) and [MEMO/11/663](#)).

Waste is good business

Meanwhile the Commission is encouraging Member States to implement existing waste legislation more effectively. Waste management and recycling industries in the EU had a turnover of € 145 billion in 2008, representing around 2 million jobs. Full compliance with EU waste policy could create an additional extra 400 000 jobs within the EU and an extra annual turnover of € 42 billion (see [IP/12/18](#)). Improved waste management would contribute to achieving several objectives and targets of the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#) for smart sustainable and inclusive growth.

More information

The report and detailed results for each Member State:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/use.htm>

ESTAT Report on municipal waste management:

[STAT/12/48](#)

Study on macroeconomic modelling of sustainable development and the links between the economy and the environment:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/studies_modelling/index.htm#macro

See also:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/index.htm>

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