

FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Agenda item 7. Waste

Intervention by the Swedish Presidency of the European Union¹



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Swedish Presidency of the European Union

Economies depend on natural resources for their prosperity. However, as the world's population grows, and living standards rise, the natural environment on which we depend is facing increasing pressure. Managing resources, including waste, in an unsustainable way also means negative impacts on health, livelihoods and on the environment.

We have, therefore, to move towards a resource efficient economy – one that will grow – but in a sustainable way.

Along with international instruments such as the Basel and Stockholm Conventions and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), the European Union has addressed these issues in its overarching Sustainable Development Strategy and in several policies, such as the Strategy on Natural Resources, the Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling, the Raw Materials Initiative, the Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production, and pieces of legislation such as the Waste Framework Directive, Directives on End-of-life Vehicles (ELV), Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and Packaging and Packaging Waste.

Their aim is to deliver the best overall environmental outcome in laying down targets as well as key concepts such as waste hierarchy and life-cycle thinking, which shall apply as a priority order in waste management policy and legislation, i.e. prevention, preparing for re-use, recycling, recovery, disposal.

Waste and recycling legislation also lay an important basis for recycling and waste management industries and are a significant contribution to economic growth and job opportunities.

However, waste management is facing new challenges that make the need for global solutions all the more important.

In the context of this CSD cycle and the theme waste, the EU considers that four issues are key to achieving sustainable development:

First, it is important to achieve “*decoupling of environmental degradation and resource consumption from economic growth, by promoting the waste hierarchy*”.

The EU is of the view that:

- “*The best waste is the one that has not been produced*”: Prevention, in particular pollutants prevention - both qualitative and quantitative -, is a key factor in any waste management strategy and should target any type of waste (hazardous, non-hazardous, radioactive). A prevention strategy should be based on the polluter pays principle, include extended producer responsibility, and act upstream on the consumption pattern and the eco-conception of the product. The RoHS directive and the REACH regulation are examples of initiatives preventing hazardous waste by regulating the use of certain substances ;
- “*Waste which can’t be prevented should be separated and used to the greatest extent possible through preparation for reuse and recycling*”: Reuse and recycling contribute to resource preservation, and when done properly to economic growth, and have a lower environmental impact than landfill and incineration ;
- “*Some wastes are very suitable for energy recovery when further recycling is not possible*” ;
- Finally, “*disposal should be restricted as much as possible to waste that can not be used in a recovery process*”: Banning landfilling of certain types of waste is therefore useful as well as targets for reducing quantities of biodegradable waste in landfills.

Our second priority is how to “*ensure the safe and environmentally sound management of waste on a high technical standard*”.

The EU considers that:

- Implementing environmentally sound waste management policies also means achieving sanitation and all health related targets in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) ; all waste treatment, including reuse and recycling, can have adverse effect on human health and the environment if not applied properly. Appropriate legislation and Best Available Techniques (BAT) to reduce the polluting emissions of waste treatments are therefore particularly helpful;
- The transfer and dissemination, on mutually agreed terms, of appropriate technologies for sound waste management for rural and urban areas in developing countries and countries with economies in transition is of major importance, for example through the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building and the 3R Initiative;
- The implementation of legislation, public access to information, public participation in decision-making processes and access to justice in the field of environment are overarching governance principles and should remain a priority in order to change perceptions of waste in civil society;

- More attention is needed towards emerging issues, such as waste generated by food production chains, electric and electronic waste, or the issue of marine litter in the oceans and regional seas;
- Emphasis should be laid on safe and environmentally sound ship recycling, as in the Hong Kong Convention, which was recently underlined in Council conclusions by the EU Environmental Ministers;
- As regards radioactive waste, it is necessary to improve measures and internationally agreed regulations regarding safety, including to put effective liability mechanisms in place, as well as focusing on low level wastes not covered by international legally binding instruments.

The third EU priority is to “*continue to combat against illegal shipments of waste*”.

The EU believes that:

- Transboundary movements of waste should take place in accordance with the requirements of the Basel Convention, including the Ban Amendment;
- Coordinated actions on illegal shipments should be developed as information and traceability are at the core of waste management policies;
- Further harmonization should be achieved with regard to the distinction between waste and non-waste in order to clarify which regulations should apply.

Finally, the fourth priority is how to “*improve the overall environmental performance of products throughout their life-cycle and continue to address unsustainable patterns of consumption and production*”:

- This is one of our key objectives to move towards an energy and resource efficient economy;
- Boosting the demand for better products and production technologies and stimulating the diffusion of lower life-cycle impact products should be a priority as well as helping consumers in making informed choices, both when buying a product and when disposing of waste;
- When it comes to improving life-cycle approach of products at international level, the fact that waste and (hazardous) chemicals are regulated through different instruments, shows that the “synergies” process between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions should be strengthened and the significance of SAICM’s work on chemicals management throughout their life-cycle should be particularly highlighted.