

FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GENEVA, 1-2 December 2009

Agenda item 7. Waste

Intervention by Switzerland¹

Development of waste disposal and recycling in Switzerland

- The tradition of developing and using environmental technologies especially for waste management has existed in Switzerland for a long time. As early as the 1960s the country became a pioneer in this domain by rigorously installing treatment and incineration plants with stringent emission standards.
- Today it can be said that Switzerland has succeeded in moving from basic waste removal to an environmentally friendly process of waste disposal and recycling. Now, incineration plants are efficient power plants which produce clean heat and electricity.

Challenge of growing flow of goods worldwide

- The total amount of municipal solid waste has been increasing constantly in Switzerland. In order to deal with this challenge, effective recycling policies and facilities were put in place. Today, 50% of the waste are collected separately and recycled. This share has more than doubled over the past 20 years.
- Recycling has become one of the main objectives and guiding principles of the Swiss waste policy. Today, Swiss recycling rates are among the highest in the world. The remaining wastes are incinerated in clean processes which generate electricity and heat.
- Another major policy element besides high waste management standards and a highly effective infrastructure are financial systems and economic instruments that were applied. In particular, a financing system was introduced that makes the waste producers responsible for the costs of disposal. This way, some of the external costs could be integrated.
- Through these waste management policies and measures, the level of environmental pressure caused by waste management was significantly reduced in Switzerland over the years despite continuous growth in the total volume solid waste.
- However, even countries with very advanced waste disposal and recycling facilities, will soon be facing new considerable challenges which it will not be able to master alone. Due to the huge flow of goods worldwide, it will not be sufficient to act at the end of the production supply chain in order to effectively control the environmental impacts. In order to work towards sustainable development, it will be even more necessary to improve social and environmental criteria all along the life cycle of goods and services.

¹ The text is presented as received from the author.