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Dispatches from Europe: Circular economy policy explained (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2016/03/15/dispatches-from-europe-circular-economy-policy-explained/>)

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Over the last few years, the concept of a “circular economy” has gained increased momentum and attention, becoming a buzzword in policy and business circles in Europe and around the world.

The latest development on the policymaking side of this conversation is the release (<http://biomassmagazine.com/articles/12639/european-commission-adopts-circular-economy-package>) of the European Commission’s Circular Economy Package, which outlines actions and legislative amendments intended to stimulate Europe’s transition away from today’s “take-make-use-dispose” linear economy to a more circular one.

Launched on Dec. 2, 2015, the package proposes significant revisions to key pieces of existing European Union legislation pertaining to waste (including the Waste Framework Directive, Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive and the Landfill Directive), as well as 52 action points to be initiated by all 28 EU member states in some way prior to 2019. Taken together, these changes, according to the Commission, should contribute to “closing the loop” of product life cycles through improved recycling and reuse.

Targets and EPR clarification

The new package establishes common EU-wide targets for recycling 65 percent of municipal waste and 75 percent of packaging waste by 2030 (with specific targets for various materials used in packaging), and a binding target to reduce landfilling to account for a maximum of 10 percent of the waste stream by 2030. The package also includes a ban on landfilling separately collected waste.

It is the hope of the European Commission that these measures will reduce waste, create incentives for diversion and keep resources in circulation for as long as possible.

In addition to the waste targets, the legislative proposals include strengthened provisions around extended producer responsibility (EPR). In particular, the Waste Framework Directive is revised to offer some long-overdue clarification regarding the “rules of the game” for producers subject to national EPR laws.

A key part of those rules – and something that is fundamental to the success of a circular economy – is the development of minimum operating standards and performance requirements. Such standards will be music to the ears of those in the waste management industry who for decades have been frustrated by a lack of transparency and minimal enforcement in EPR frameworks.

The directive requires producers to cover the “entire cost” of waste management for the products they place on the market, “taking into account the revenues from reuse or sales of secondary materials from their products.”

This is a positive and logical step. By further shifting the responsibility for waste management to the party that has the most control over the design of products and packaging, municipal funds currently used to help cover the cost of recycling can be re-directed elsewhere.

Everyone counts the same

Another core element of the new waste proposals is a harmonized calculation methodology for recycling and reuse targets.

As it currently stands, nations of the EU can calculate recycling rates using different methods. This is problematic in many ways. Some countries use “input” into the recycling process (i.e. tonnage of waste collected) as the measurement point at which recycling is counted, even though that includes non-recyclable material and material going to landfill or incineration. Aside from making it impossible to make a credible nation-by-nation comparison of recycling performance, the use of different calculation methodologies undermines the validity of reported recycling rates.



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The latest recycling industry news

ISRI poll suggests few adults believe myths about recycling (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2017/01/04/isri-poll-suggests-few-adults-believe-myths-about-recycling/>)

Even in this era of fake news, people haven’t grown distrustful of their community’s recycling system, a study indicates.

Waste Management says it will stop talking tonnages (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2017/01/04/waste-management-says-it-will-stop-talking-tonnages/>)

In Waste Management’s latest sustainability report, the hauling and recycling giant noted it will begin emphasizing the environmental impact of its materials diversion activities instead of metrics based on weight.

More cities try to find answer for glass recycling (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2017/01/04/more-cities-try-to-find-answer-for-glass-recycling/>)

Not surprisingly, the great glass debate is continuing into 2017. Four municipalities from different corners of the country recently made moves or began discussions to try to recover glass in a more cost-effective manner.

In other news: Jan. 3, 2017 (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2017/01/03/in-other-news-jan-3-2017/>)

The Windy City’s recycling rate sees another drop, and some residents are unhappy with the way Charlotte, N.C. wants OCC placed in the cart.

Q&A: Reflecting on the How2Recycle label’s growth (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2016/12/20/qa-reflecting-on-the-how2recycle-labels-growth/>)

The How2Recycle label, a project of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC), celebrated many milestones in 2016, including a big boost from Walmart.

The proposed change in the methodology attempts to address this situation by moving the point of measurement to the “output” of recovered material that is actually bound for reuse or recycling. In other words, the new method factors in downstream losses, which can be significant for some materials, especially plastics.

While this is certainly a step in the right direction, more needs to be done to amend the proposed calculation method, which includes the weight of products and materials prepared for reuse. Reuse should be tracked, but it should not be counted toward the broader recycling targets of each nation. By keeping reuse and recycling data separate, the EU can help mitigate the possibility of large weight-related gaps and overshadowing effects in data amalgamation.

Separation is the best approach to setting goals for both quality recycling and prevention through reuse.

A look at what’s next

The Circular Economy Package has made its way to the European Council and the European Parliament, the two branches of the EU that will negotiate the package over the next 12 to 18 months. This process of compromise and negotiation enables the Parliament and Council to agree on key elements of the package proposed by the Commission before it is passed into law.

While there is still much debate to be had over the finer details of the legislative proposals and action plan, it is safe to say that the notion of circular economy is set to have a growing role in EU policy in the coming years, with profound implications for manufacturing and waste management industries alike.

Clarissa Morawski is based in Barcelona and serves as the managing director of the ReLoop Platform (<http://www.reloopplatform.eu/>), which brings together industry, government, and non-governmental organizations in Europe to form a network for advances in policy that create enabling system conditions for circularity across the European economy. Clarissa is also principal of Canada-based CM Consulting Inc. (<http://www.cmconsultinginc.com/>)

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Closed Loop Fund offers insight into two major investments (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2016/12/20/closed-loop-fund-offers-insight-into-two-major-investments/>)

A nonprofit recycling operation in Minnesota has received nearly \$10 million from the Closed Loop Fund and other investors.

Can recycling keep pace with plastic’s evolution? (<http://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2016/12/20/can-recycling-keep-pace-with-plastics-evolution/>)

Innovators in the resin realm often get a bad rap for prioritizing functionality over recyclability. But according to one bioplastics executive, end-of-life is still top-of-mind for many companies developing cutting-edge materials.

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