



EU laws on waste disposal

Summary: The EU requires member states to limit the production of waste, and recycle or re-use waste as much as possible.

The EU encourages manufacturers to design products in such a way as to maximise the use of materials that can be recycled and to simplify the way products can be dismantled for re-use.

Landfill

The EU seeks to reduce the use of landfill, recover more energy from incineration plants and improve the quantity and quality of recycling. Two thirds of biodegradable waste has to be disposed of other than by landfill.

Across the EU 49 per cent of domestic waste is sent to landfill, 33 per cent is recycled or composted and 18 per cent is sent to incinerators that produce energy for national grids.

In the UK every tonne of waste sent to landfill costs council tax payers £32, a figure that will rise to £48 in 2010.

There are EU laws applied in all member states governing the use and operation of landfill sites for the disposal of waste so as to protect surface water, ground water, soil, air and human health.

Packaging waste

There are EU laws governing the recycling and disposal by energy from waste plants (incinerators) of packaging waste, that is, the packaging of food, drinks, consumer goods and office products.

By 2002 60% of packaging waste was either recovered or disposed of in energy from waste plants and 54% was recycled. The target for recycling for December 31, 2008 was between 50 and 80%.

Today about one third of packaging of soft drinks, mineral water and wine in the form of bottles and PET containers (polyethylene terephthalate) is reused. The recycling of plastic is proving more difficult.

In the UK on average 60% of supermarket food packaging is recycled.

Waste electrical and electronic equipment

An EU directive of January 2003 that came into force in August 2005 lays down rules for the return to producers of a wide range of home and office equipment such as household appliances and computers and for the re-use of the materials of which they are made.

Producers are required to apply the best available treatment and techniques for the recovery and recycling of this equipment. By December 2006 an average of four kilos of waste electrical and electronic equipment per inhabitant per annum was the collection target across the EU.

Today the recycling target per weight for large domestic appliances is 80% and for smaller appliances, electrical goods and toys the target is 70%. The date for achieving these targets has been extended to 2012 for the 10 countries that joined the EU in 2004.

For more information on EU waste management policy, strategy and directives:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/environment/waste_management/index_en.htm