

## Environment

# Major recycling operation for Europe's waste policy

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Parliament mounted an assault on Europe's growing waste mountain when it beefed up the new framework directive on waste proposed by the European Commission. Despite existing legislation, we are producing more waste every year. MEPs are convinced this cannot go on: they want the upward curve to be halted in 2012 and waste production to start declining from 2020.

Parliament adopted a report by Caroline Jackson (EPP-ED, UK) on the framework directive by 651 votes to 19 with 16 abstentions (co-decision procedure, first reading). They also adopted an own-initiative report by Johannes Blokland (IND/DEM, NL) on the "thematic strategy" for waste, a more general text without binding rules, whose content they wish to flesh out and make more ambitious. The vote on this report was 662 to 17, with 3 abstentions.

As result of these votes, the principle of a "hierarchy (in the treatment) of waste" is for the first time laid down in a piece of draft legislation as well as in the "thematic strategy", which will give rise to other, more specific, measures in future.

The main aim of the "hierarchy" is to prevent and reduce waste production. It also lays down an order of preference for waste operations: re-use, recycling, other recovery operations and, as a last resort, safe and environmentally sound disposal.

Opinions differed among MEPs as to how binding this hierarchy should be. In the end it was agreed that derogations from the order of priorities should only be allowed on the basis of established, publicly available scientific criteria.

### **Incinerators in the firing line**

For MEPs a crucial point is to reduce the amount of landfill and incineration, both of which cause pollution. In the debate ahead of the vote, however, Members were divided over whether incineration should be regarded as a form of disposal or a recovery operation. The Commission initially proposed that it should be categorised as recovery, provided it meets a certain energy efficiency standard.

MEPs backed the energy efficiency principle by laying down a scale of standards to be met by incinerators.

In the end a majority of MEPs rejected the idea that incineration should be regarded as recovery. If this option remains in the legislation at the end of the co-decision procedure, those involved in waste processing will no longer be able to opt as easily as they can today for the simple solution of incineration.

### **Stopping waste from piling up**

MEPs also want Member States to draw up national prevention programmes within 18 months of the entry-into-force of the directive. The aim would be to stabilise waste production at the level reached in 2008 by 2012. In addition, reduction targets to be reached by 2020 would have to be laid down by 2010.

Parliament also introduces targets for re-use and recycling. By 2020, 50% of municipal solid waste and 70% of waste from construction, demolition, industry and manufacturing must be re-used or recycled. In principle any waste must, wherever possible, at least be recovered. Rules on landfill are also tightened up.

The "thematic strategy" now contains a schedule: - by 2015, landfill will be banned for at least paper, glass, textiles, plastic and metal and separate waste collection systems for these categories must be set up; - by 2020, no recyclable waste must end up in landfill sites.

### **Tough negotiations with Council ahead**

MEPs added a good many further provisions or principles which are more binding than those contained in the Commission's initial proposal:

- introduction of a "polluter-pays principle";
- introduction of a "proximity principle", i.e. that waste for disposal should be processed in one of the "nearest appropriate installations", regardless of national frontiers;
- a new article on traceability and control of hazardous waste;
- a ban on mixing different categories of hazardous waste; hazardous compounds should be separated from all waste streams before they enter the recovery chain;
- a call for legislation to be proposed to define which secondary products are no longer deemed to be waste;
- new articles on biowaste and catering waste;
- new articles on permits, especially for hazardous waste, and on sanctions;
- creation of a Consultation Forum on Waste Management.

The ambitious goals that Parliament has laid down with this first reading vote, together with the differing views, for example over incineration, herald a tricky co-decision procedure with the Council. At present, in some Member States, up to 90% of municipal waste goes to landfill sites. Europe-wide, only 33% of waste is recycled or composted.