

Products and waste in a circular economy

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Circular economy

In a circular economy, the value of materials and products is kept as long and as high as possible for as long as possible.

Product stages

Design

Production

Use

End of life

Products and waste – the present stage

Waste hierarchy (directive 2008/98):

- prevention
- preparing for re-use
- recycling
- other recovery, eg. energy recovery
- disposal

The hierarchy is in practice not binding

As prevention is the first priority, there is an obligation to make an active product policy which addresses the design, production and use-stage of materials.

Integrated product policy and circular economy

EU Commission (2003): Integrated product policy is an approach which seeks to reduce the environmental impacts of products from the mining of raw materials to production, distribution, use and waste management.

Subsequent communications of 2009 and 2010.

However, the Commission favoured voluntary measures by economic operators and did not wish to recur to legislative acts.

Circular economy , COM(2014) 398; action plan COM(2015) 614; progress report
COM (2017) 33

Commitment to look at reparability, durability, upgradability, recyclability;
guidance on best waste management and efficiency;
encourage reuse, improve guarantees, identify planned
obsolescence; promote green public procurement;
ensure better waste management

Product - waste

The basic difference remains: typically, a person wants to get rid of waste, as the material has no economic or other advantage for the person; this is different for a product.

This differentiation is not always very clear (meststof). However, legislation has to start from the typical situation, not from the borderline cases.

Agricultural waste (when it is free of chemicals) is certainly a specific case. However, a deletion of the notion of waste for agricultural waste would not solve problems (discharge of slurry into water; groundwater pollution; quantities of waste).

As circular economy requires a product policy, it is a strategic error to start with the last stage in the life-cycle of a product, the waste stage. Such an approach reveals the interests of economic operators: finding ways of reducing the costs of waste handling.

Production and consumption

Present stage

- Production of scale
at cheapest price

- Short life time (obsolescence)
„new is beautiful“

- Protecting health and environment
- taken care by public authorities

- Waste stage: charge of authorities
of health and environment

Circular economy

- longevity, reparability reuse (local service);
the local service is determinant

- purchase of product depends on service

- producer has interest to avoid risk

- waste stage.: incentive to return
producer takes care of risk

Is the environmental balance better in a circular economy?

Does it make sense to abolish the term of „waste“?

- (1) Municipal waste
- (2) Hazardous waste
- (3) Extended producer responsibility (take back) as a solution
- (4) The Third World as a waste (end-of life products) bin

EU/Member States responsibility

Product policy is to a very large extent EU competence.

- Cleaner production
- Substitution of undesirable substances
- Alternative products
- Extending the lifetime of products
- End of waste status (provisional measures MSt, Art.6(4) of 2008/98)
- Ecodesign (measures to improve re-use, repair, redistribution, refurbishment)

National competence

- Taxes (reduced tax for repair work)
- Financial incentives for repair/reuse services

Examples for possible actions

„Circular economy policy is the long and patient drilling of hard wood“

- Substitution
systematic replacement of heavy metals, endocrine disruptors;
- Systematic information on products containing substances of very high concern;
- Obsolescence
- Prolongation of consumer guarantees
- Organic farming (taxes)
- Reduced taxes for repair services
- Develop equal standards for new and recycled products (negative example: Cd in PVC)
- Standards for recycled products which are equivalent

Thank you for your attention