

Thematic Strategy on the recycling of waste

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The Commission presents a report examining the progress made in achieving the goals of the Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste which will contribute to the evaluation of the [6th Environmental Action Programme](#). Adopted in 2005, the Strategy sets out key actions to modernise the existing legal framework and to promote waste prevention, reuse and recycling, with waste disposal only as last resort.

The Commission considers that **significant progress has been achieved** on a number of fronts, particularly in the improvement and simplification of legislation (in the [Waste Shipment Regulation \(EC\) No 1013/2006](#), and the establishment and diffusion of key concepts such as the waste hierarchy and life-cycle thinking, on setting focus on waste prevention, on coordination of efforts to improve knowledge, and on setting new European collection and recycling targets. In connection with the latter, the Commission cites particularly the [revised Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC \(WFD\)](#) and the Landfill Directive 99/31/EC. The WFD also modernised the concept of 'waste' to encourage a life cycle approach, for example, by clarifying the distinction between wastes and 'by-products' and introducing 'end of-waste criteria' clarifying when waste ceases to be waste. Clear definitions of "re-use" have also been introduced in the WFD, as well as new re-use targets in the proposal on the WEEE Directive recast.

The report notes that **overall, recycling rates have improved** (at 38% in 2008, a progress of 5% compared with 2005 and 18% compared to 1995).

The amount of waste going to landfill has decreased: roughly 40% in 2008, compared to 49% in 2005, and 65% in 1995.

The simplification of the waste acquis makes it more cost-efficient. However, **large implementation and enforcement differences persist between Member States**. Some Member States have gone far beyond achieving the minimum European recycling or landfill diversion targets although others will have to make additional efforts to respect the EU requirements. In addition to good governance and a strong political will, the advanced Member States have created better conditions for the recycling markets by optimally using legal and economic instruments such as landfill bans, applying taxes and charges consistent with the waste hierarchy and applying the producer responsibility concept to various waste streams. This had led to a progressive internalisation of the waste management costs into the price of products and services.

In most Member States, **waste generation seems to increase, or at best, has stabilised**. However, due to a strong decrease in 4 Member States, for the EU-27, total annual waste generation decreased with 10% between 2006 and 2008. Municipal solid waste (MSW) generation (7% of total waste) has now stabilised around 524 kg per year and per capita (2008) in the EU-27. There is a relative decoupling between waste generation and consumption (which increased by 16.3 % between 1999 and in 2007). Large differences exist between Member States - from around 400 to 800 kg per capita. This compares to 750kg in the USA, and 400kg in Japan.

If little tangible progress can be seen in quantitative waste prevention, some results have been obtained in qualitative waste prevention. For instance, the application of the substance ban of the [Restriction of Hazardous Substances \(RoHS Directive\) 2002/95/EC](#) since 2006 has reduced the amount of potentially harmful substances in electronics placed on the EU market by about 110.000 tonnes annually.

Hazardous waste (3% of total waste) continues to decrease in the EU-12, notably due to the introduction of cleaner technology and mine closures although at EU-27 level an annual increase of 0.5% can still be observed. This also represents a relative decoupling with GDP growth.

Whilst recycling rates vary from one waste stream to another, **overall waste recycling in the EU has increased**. In 2008, waste recycling was estimated at 38%, a progress of 5% compared to 2005 and 18 % compared to 1995. 40% of municipal waste was recycled or composted in 2008, a progress of 11.4 % between 2005 and 2008, with significant disparities between Member States (from few percent to 70%).

Energy recovery from waste has increased (from 96 kg per capita in 2005 to 102kg in 2008), having led to an increase in energy production: around at 1.3% of the EU 27 total energy production comes from incineration of MSW. It has been estimated that 50 to 60% of municipal waste incinerators in the EU will meet the new energy efficiency criteria of the WFD.

Improved waste management **reduces negative environmental and health impacts** due to emissions to air, soil and water as well as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from waste disposal. Direct GHG emissions from the waste sector in the EU-27 – representing 2.8% of the total emissions in 2007, have decreased by more than 30% between 1995 and 2007.

Since the adoption of the Strategy, the closure of sub-standard landfills and incinerators has led to significant reduction of water, soil and air pollution. A high number of sub-standard landfills have been closed down (around 3.300 closures between 2004 and 2006).

Nevertheless, approximately 1000 substandard landfills have been identified by the Commission as sub-standard landfills to be upgraded or closed as soon as possible.

Recycling provides new economic opportunities. However, the EU's recycling of specific metals which are essential for some key applications remains low. It was estimated in 2009 that waste management and recycling industries in the EU have a turnover of EUR 95 billion. The sector provides between 1.2 and 1.5 million jobs contributing to meet the [EU 2020](#) objective of 75% employment rate and representing around 1% of GDP. Apart from waste avoidance, re-use generates other benefits in terms of job creation, reduction of over consumption and providing second hand products at accessible prices.

The report concludes that, after 5 years, the Strategy's main objectives remain valid. The Commission sees a need for further consolidation of its waste policies and will make further proposals in 2012, including concrete steps it intends to take in order to further move towards an EU resource-efficient recycling society.