

Environment and health: waste electrical and electronic equipment WEEE

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The Conciliation Committee reached an agreement on a joint text for the directive. The compromise package may be summarised as follows: - Collection and recovery of waste equipment: the Member States have until 2005 to introduce take-back systems and collection facilities for all electrical and electronic equipment. Electrical and electronic equipment must not end up in unsorted municipal waste but must be collected separately. On the key question of a binding collection rate for electrical waste, the compromise reached requires evidence to be provided of a binding collection rate of 4 kg of electrical waste per inhabitant a year by the end of 2006 at the latest. A series of individual quotas has also been agreed for the recovery of particular categories of waste equipment. For example, by 31 December 2006 recycling quotas of 50% for small household appliances (toasters, vacuum cleaners, etc) and 75% for large household appliances (refrigerators, etc) must be achieved; - Financing in respect of waste equipment from private households: the financing arrangement agreed is based on the principle that consumers should be able to return waste appliances free of charge. Producers are responsible for financing the collection and disposal of this waste equipment. Parliament also managed to push through its position on 'individual financing' whereby individual producers finance the disposal of their own products. The aim is to ensure that the individual liability of producers is directly reflected in more recycling-friendly product design. Although the costs are to be borne by individual producers, the collection and treatment can still be carried out collectively. As a result of pressure from Parliament, it was also agreed that each producer should provide a guarantee that disposal will be financed when electrical and electronic equipment is purchased. This will prevent producers who disappear from the market from failing to comply with their financing obligations. A special form of financing was agreed for the disposal of appliances marketed before 2005 ('historical waste'). As there are a large number of 'no-name' products and appliances whose producers can no longer be traced or no longer exist, the disposal of this waste equipment can only be financed collectively. This means that the costs involved will be borne proportionately by the producers on the market when the relevant costs occur. For a transitional period, however, producers will have the option of showing consumers these costs at the time of the purchase of new equipment ('visible fee'); - Labelling of equipment: it was agreed that producers of electrical and electronic equipment should be required to label their products clearly to allow easier identification and dating. Parliament had argued that this was crucial with regard to the future individual financing of disposal, in that only if producers could be clearly identified could they be made liable for subsequently financing the disposal costs. It was also agreed that consumers must be informed through appropriate labelling that waste equipment should not be disposed of with household waste and that all waste equipment is to be collected separately; - Product design: Parliament's efforts focused specifically on the need for reuse and recycling. To discourage practices adopted by individual producers who build in various electronic devices ('clever chips') to prevent equipment from being reused or recycled (for example, ink jet cartridges for printers), a new article has been inserted in the text of the Directive providing that dismantling and recovery should be facilitated at the production stage. In particular, technical design features which prevent equipment from being reused are to be avoided.