

Waste management: landfill

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The committee then set about adopting a report (first reading, cooperation procedure) by Caroline JACKSON (EPP, UK) amending a Commission proposal for a Council Directive on the landfill of waste. This is the second stab at a landfill directive. The Commission's first proposal had been submitted in 1991 but was withdrawn last year after Parliament had rejected the Council's common position on the grounds that permitted exemptions from the scope of the legislation meant it would apply to less than half the Community's territory. Possible exemptions - for islands and isolated settlements - are much more limited in the new proposal. The aim of the directive, which has massive implications for waste disposal throughout the Union, is to prevent or reduce environmental damage (particularly water, soil and air pollution) and health risks due to the landfilling of waste. A committee amendment brought the threat to the global environment (inter alia, from greenhouse gases such as methane) within the the scope of the directive. Another amendment stressed that landfill, which includes the underground burial of waste (eg in disused mines) as well as more conventional rubbish tips and municipal dumps, is the option of last resort in the waste hierarchy of prevention, recovery, recycling, incineration and landfill. Among other things, this is because of the build-up within landfills of highly pollutant gases (such as methane) derived from biodegradable waste. These gases then seep out into the atmosphere. To prevent this, the directive sets compulsory targets (beefed up by the committee) for a reduction in the amount of biodegradable waste which can be put in landfills. The committee insists that it is ecologically more sensible to make compost and biogas from biodegradable waste than to landfill or incinerate it. Members are also against allowing giant tyres to be dumped in landfills. The committee called on the Council to adopt economic measures, such as a tax on waste intended for landfill. In the absence of Community measures, Member States should act. And there should be no time limit on the liability of landfill site operators for damage caused by their activities. The amended report was adopted unopposed with one abstention - the rapporteur, Mrs JACKSON, who did not agree with the targets approved by the committee for reducing biodegradable waste in landfills. In the discussion earlier, Mrs Jackson, who is concerned about the extent to which the directive will be complied with in practice as well as the costs that it will give rise to, said that there might be instances where landfill was the best environmental option.