

Packaging and packaging waste

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The Commission has presented its report on the implementation of Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste and its impact on the environment, as well as on the functioning of the internal market.

Packaging is a relatively small but not insignificant product and waste stream. In 2002, around 66 million tonnes of packaging waste were generated in EU15. This is around 5% of total waste generation. Packaging waste accounts for around 17% of municipal waste by weight⁸ and between 20% and 30% by volume. However, weight is not the best indicator for the environmental impacts of packaging waste and the impacts of packaging throughout its life cycle. The overall environmental impacts of packaging are in the order of magnitude of one to a few percent of the overall economy. For example, the greenhouse gas emissions related to packaging consumption in the EU15 are estimated at around 80 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per annum. This is around 2% of total greenhouse gas emissions of EU15. The share of packaging for other environmental impacts, such as air acidification, fine particles and eutrophication is of a comparable magnitude.

The ex-post assessment of the impact of the Packaging Directive on the environment shows an increase of packaging recovery and incineration at waste incineration plants with energy recovery by 9% and an increase of packaging recycling by 8% between 1997 and 2002. At the same time, all the targets established in the directive were met in 2002. Recycling of packaging had positive environmental effects, including greenhouse gas savings and resource savings. Other environmental benefits include reduced emissions of particulates, decreased acidification, less traffic noise, odours, visual disturbance etc. These are noticeable and significant benefits of the industry's efforts to implement the requirements of the Packaging Directive. The data demonstrate that the additional costs related to the recycling obligations of the Packaging Directive as compared to other waste management options (e.g. disposal) are not significantly higher and show a decreasing trend. The costs for packaging recycling are in the same order of magnitude as the most cost-efficient alternatives to reduce CO₂ emissions and other environmental impacts.

The Commission considers that the recycling and recovery targets contained in the Packaging Directive are currently optimal and should remain stable to enable all the Member States to catch-up with these targets. A substantial progress on prevention can only be achieved through the application of measures tailored to specific conditions in which packaged goods are marketed such as, for instance, consumption and distribution patterns. Incorporating in waste framework legislation an obligation for Member States to develop waste prevention programmes as proposed by the Commission in the context of the Thematic Strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste constitutes an appropriate instrument to promote waste prevention in general as well as prevention of packaging waste in particular.

In the longer term, recycling of packaging waste must be seen in the general framework of EU waste recycling policy as defined in the Thematic Strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste. The Commission intends to include an assessment of the progress made by the Member States in preventing, recycling and recovering waste in the 2010 review of the Thematic Strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste. This assessment shall build, inter alia, on an update of the assessment of the impacts of the Packaging Directive and take into account the progress of the Member States towards the increased recycling rates set by the European Parliament and the Council in the 2004 review of the Directive.

There is evidence (particularly in the beverage sector) that the Directive has not yet fully achieved its internal market objective. This is partly due to incorrect implementation of the provisions of the Packaging Directive, but also due to the increasing number of unilateral measures leading to a partitioned

market. Therefore, the Commission will further evaluate the need for action that could be taken on the EU level to avoid constraints as regards the internal market in the future. Progress towards the proper enforcement of the essential requirements and harmonized definitions and reporting procedures across Member States will further contribute to the creation of a level playing field for all economic operators.