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Waste avoidance and recycling on the basis of producer responsibility

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The objective of this study is to answer the question of how the notion of producer responsibility can contribute to the avoidance and the recycling of waste. This question is particularly interesting for the development of the Federal Waste Management Plan 2006.

Defining the term “producer responsibility” is very difficult. First and foremost, producer responsibility is closely associated with waste-related initiatives and activities of producers and retailers of certain products. These activities are often responsive to the lifecycle of certain products and are similar to the concept of Integrated Product Policy (IPP). Predominantly the term “producer responsibility” is, however, used to signify take-back and recycling schemes of waste or certain waste streams. These schemes are referred to in this study as systems of “post cautionary producer responsibility”.

In general producer responsibility can be construed as an element of IPP or of responsibility for the products. Producer responsibility is a certain aspect of the overall responsibility that an entrepreneur bears for his activities and as such is a part of the Corporate Social Responsibility that covers social and ecological aspects.

After an examination of the existing instruments of the post cautionary producer responsibility it could be concluded that these instruments serve three purposes;

- The protection of raw materials / ressources,
- The promotion of the recycling of raw materials,
- The elimination of hazardous substances.

The instruments applied in the EU and Austria on such diverse waste streams as packaging, electronic devices, cars and batteries appear suited to achieve first and foremost the second and third objectives. However, the consumption of ressources and the amount of waste will probably not be diminished by these instruments.

The study has depicted the framework of the instruments of producer responsibility. Following a life-cycle analysis method, construction and municipal waste have then been identified as decisive waste streams for the development of instruments of producer responsibility. From the point of view of waste management the most problematic waste streams are the waste that is produced by the deconstruction of chimneys as well as waste that stems from the renovation of houses, flats, etc. As far as municipal waste is concerned mixed waste with organic contents as well as old cars, electronic devices and further special waste can be identified as decisive waste streams.

- Take-back and separate collection schemes exist already. Therefore the extension of such schemes beyond the existing legal prerequisites is not necessary. However, various measures intended to promote the sparing of ressources by avoiding waste and recycling are recommended.

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- As far as construction waste is concerned the legal framework should be closely analysed and evaluated. The introduction of an ecological certificate applying to buildings could be well advised. This is also true of some elements of the demolition protocol.
- Providing information on how to avoid and recycle waste is another important aspect. Examples include the re-use of products or the use of the product for other purposes as the original ones.

All in all, the problems of waste management – expressed in quality and quantity – cannot be solved only by the management of waste disposal but can only be dealt with in connection with a sustainable economic system.

The necessary measures have to be taken prior to waste management. The study refers to many possible ways of action:

- The introduction of regional quotas of waste diminution in connection with regional or local strategies for sustainability,
- The transformation of the tax system into a system that includes ecological objectives, particularly the introduction of financial levies on the disposal of specific post-consumer goods,
- The promotion of sustainable consumption patterns,
- The promotion of IPP and Corporate Social Responsibility,
- The participation in the exchange of information between the actors of One-World-Organisations and in processes of local agenda 21.

In conclusion it can be noted that a waste-management structure that conforms to the objectives of the local Agenda 21 is essential to ensure that producers take responsibility for their waste.