

Aim to burn only non-recyclables, says Commission

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Europe is aiming for a waste management policy where waste is considered a valuable resource and only non-recyclable waste is used for energy recovery, the EU's waste industry leaders were told last week.

The message came from Janez Potocnik, EU Commissioner for the Environment, and was reinforced in a separate presentation by EU official Rosalinde van der Vlies at the industry's FEAD annual conference held in Helsinki.



Janez Potocnik, EU Commissioner for the Environment, spoke of the need to be ambitious in terms of reducing and recycling waste

Mr Potocnik, in a pre-recorded video message, said: "Under the Roadmap for a Resource Efficient Europe, effective waste management will have a central role. I believe that we will have moved close to a resource efficient society when landfilling is reduced to virtually zero, when we only bury the residues of the residues and when energy recovery is limited to non-recyclable materials.

Possible

"We will only achieve these kinds of targets if we get to the stage where waste is considered as a valuable resource. That is our challenge, but I know that it is possible. Why, because it is already starting to happen. Recycling of municipal waste has doubled in the last 10 years and landfilling has reduced from 62% to 40%."

The Commissioner also suggested there will be higher recycling targets in the future and spoke of the need for waste industry involvement in the proposals through FEAD, the pan-European trade association of which the UK's Environmental Services Association is a member.

Mr Potocnik declared: ““We will certainly need your experience and also your engagement. We will need it in supporting full implementation of our waste legislation, particularly the new Waste Framework Directive, so that we can climb further up the waste hierarchy. We will need it to push our ambitions further, as we start to review targets for prevention, reuse and recycling and for landfill diversion. We will need it to help deliver on the higher collection targets that we are pushing already for waste electrical and electronic equipment.”

Priorities

The importance of the EU’s resource roadmap, ([see letsrecycle.com story](#)) was also highlighted by Rosalinde van der Vlies, deputy head of waste management unit, DG Environment, European Commission.

Speaking at the FEAD conference in Helsinki, she said: “We are all in this together, it all boils down to preserving the beautiful planet we are living on, there is no Planet B, or at least not yet. The Roadmap has three priorities, five targets and seven flagships. Priorities are for smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth.

“Targets include 75% employment by 2020, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% and similarly to increase recycling efficiencies and use of renewable energy to 20%. We are also seeking a reduction of poverty which is now affecting 80 million people to 20 million.” And, Mrs Van der Vlies added: “The beauty of the 2020 strategy is that these targets have been transferred to national governments, it is not a top down approach.”

There is a new momentum for waste policies in Europe, the EU official said, and she explained that there were “two very strict and clear angles” to waste policy.

First, said Mrs Van der Vlies, this was “the application of the waste hierarchy, landfilling reducing to nearly zero and energy recovery of non-recyclable waste”.



Helsinki was the venue for this year's FEAD European waste industry conference: next year's event will be held in Germany

Second, the new Roadmap will see the development of an indicator for the proportion of secondary raw materials used in the EU economy on the production of new products. The intention is to put forward proposals in 2014.

Also in 2014 she said there would be new targets for other waste streams as well as a review of the landfill diversion targets.

Cautious

Something of a counter response to the Commission's views came from Finland's Liberal Democrat MEP, Rikka Manner, who is a substitute member of the Environment Committee working with Dutch MEP Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy who is the Parliament Rapporteur on the Roadmap.

The tone of Ms Manner's presentation was for a more cautious approach and thinking through of the Roadmap, and she pointed out that "the Roadmap is not yet a legally binding proposal".

The MEP agreed that "Europe's wealth and growth has been based on intensive use of resources and the era of cheap resources is over and said that while Europe should take the lead, the whole world needed more efficient use of resources.

Ms Manner added that the potential for the waste management sector to contribute to resource efficiency is very significant. "There is no need to regulate heavily, we need to boost this sector with opportunities."