

Newsletter from September 13th, 2007

1. Who is driving WEEE responsibility in the USA?

- *Sony is launching its 'Sony Take Back Recycling Program'*
- *Since last year progress has been more evident in the corporate sector than the political!*

Sony, a worldwide brand in consumer electronics, is launching its 'Sony Take Back Recycling Program' on 15 September. It will allow consumers to recycle all Sony-branded products for no fee at 75 drop-off centres throughout the US. Furthermore, it allows consumers to recycle other manufacturers' consumer electronics products at market prices, and may include a recycling fee for some types of materials.

Meanwhile, almost one year ago to the day (on 13 September 2006) a press release was published announcing that 'Today, the bipartisan Congressional E-Waste Working Group will bring together some of the nation's largest e-waste stakeholders to develop a solution to the growing problem of obsolete electronics disposal'.

Since then, progress has been more evident in the corporate sector than the political (at least on a national level). Adding weight to this conclusion is Hewlett Packard, which announced earlier this summer that it had met its recycling targets six months early. Mark Hurd, HP chairman and CEO commented 'Environmental responsibility is good business. We've reached the tipping point where the price and performance of IT are no longer compromised by being green, but are now enhanced by it.'

Returning to the Sony announcement, Ted Smith, Chair of the Computer TakeBack Campaign, a national coalition promoting responsible recycling and green design for consumer electronics, reflected 'This is the kind of corporate responsibility that we rarely see in this country, but that we as consumers should insist on, before we buy any company's products'.

Source: Waste Management World

2. WEEE: News from Germany, Poland and Switzerland!

- *90.6% of big companies dispose their old lamps properly in Germany!*
- *Poland: new political elections cause delay to the amendment of the WEEE Act!*
- *Switzerland compares recycling rates with EU targets!*

Germany:

According to the magazine EUWID (no. 35) the German collective take back system for lamps Lightcycle published its figures for 2006. From March 2006, where they started their operative work, to the end of 2006 27.5 million old gas discharge lamps were collected and treated by the system. Statistics show that only big companies dispose their old lamps properly in accordance with the WEEE directive – about 90.6%. Only 34.7% of medium and small-sized businesses and only 10.5% of small businesses and private households bring their old lamps to special collection points but dispose them of in the household waste.

Lightcycle assumes that the reason for the wrong disposal is the lack of knowledge that the WEEE directive makes a difference between gas discharge lamps and bulbs. They try to find ways how the collection quantities could be improved in the future.

The association “Qualitätsgemeinschaft zur Verwertung von Kühlgeräten und Elektro-/Elektronikgeräten e. V. (QVKE) announced that due to the theft and illegal dismantling of valuable items the quality of recycling declines. It is also harmful for the environment if CFCs and refrigerants leak. Recycling companies have therefore problems to meet their calculations and price structure.

Furthermore the association believes that a big amount of WEEE is disposed of in the household waste and that another part is sold abroad. QVKE supposes that about 1.2 million tons of WEEE should be collected each year – but the actual figures amount only to about 800,000 tons.

In Germany there are currently discussions between the German Register EAR and a study provided by Professor Mario Schmidt of the college of higher education from Pforzheim regarding the calculation of the pick-up order of full containers from the WEEE collection points. The study says that EEE producers that place on the market only a small amount of electronic appliances are disadvantaged in comparison to producers selling higher quantities.

EAR argues that according to data protection they could not provide Professor Schmidt with proper data he would have needed for an objective calculation. So his results would not be in compliance with the practice.

In the study Professor Schmidt recommends an alternative algorithm to calculate the pick-up orders whereas the EAR argues that the results of the new algorithm would be quite similar to those of the existing one. Discussions are still going on.

Poland:

As already mentioned there are at the moment new political elections in preparation in Poland what causes delay to the amendment of the WEEE Act.

Thus it is expected that Poland will not reach the 4 kg collection target for 2008 as the current WEEE Act does not mandate the 4 kg or any other collection target.

That is why till now there has not been a lot of investment into collection facilities and consumer information. In 2006 Poland had only a collection volume of about 100 gr per inhabitant what is the lowest of the EU.

Also the recovery rate of WEEE is not satisfying in Poland at the moment. The recycling rate of collected WEEE is said to be only about 9% at the moment. But it has to be mentioned that the recovery targets

have to be reached by January 2008! One of the problems could be that the foreign treatment plants that fulfil the waste management for the Polish systems, do not report the recovery data to the Polish system.

The amendment that is already prepared but not sent to Parliament yet will probably allow foreign producers to become a member of a collective system which will be able to register the foreign producers in the Polish register. Whereas Polish importers will still be obliged to register, too.

Also the reporting frequency to the national register will be changed from 3 to 6 months.

Switzerland:

The collective system SENS has published a study that determines the exact material composition that results from recycling of EEE in Switzerland. They compare the results with the treatment targets from the European Union within the WEEE directive.

The result is that for large household WEEE an average recycling rate of about 74% was reached in the Switzerland. Compared to the European target of 75% there would still be room for improvement.

Looking at the figures for lamps and small WEEE the recycling targets of the EU could be reached easily: For lamps an average of 90% was obtained compared to an EU target of 80% and for small appliances an average of 70% compared to 50% from the EU were achieved.

Those who are interested to read the whole "Technical Report 2006"

in German:

http://www.sens.ch/global/pdf/marktplatz/070101_SENS_FB_2006_d.pdf

in Italian:

http://www.sens.ch/global/pdf/marktplatz/070101_SENS_FB_2006_i.pdf

in French:

http://www.sens.ch/global/pdf/marktplatz/070101_SENS_FB_2006_f.pdf

Source: Kerp consulting

3. Chemicals' competitiveness focus of new high-level group!

- *First of a series of meetings aimed at boosting the competitiveness of the chemicals industry in Europe!*
- *The group will seek to identify how to raise the profile of this sector!*

Nine months after the adoption of strict new EU health and safety rules for the sector (REACH), high-level stakeholders from the chemicals industry gathered in the first of a series of meetings aimed at boosting the competitiveness of a sector representing 5% of Europe's GDP.

In a bid to guarantee the future health of one of Europe's largest manufacturing sectors, the Commission launched on 10 September a "High Level Group on the Competitiveness of the European Chemicals Industry", consisting of commissioners and senior policymakers from the public and private sectors and civil society.

The aim of the initiative is three-fold.

Firstly, to strengthen the competitiveness of this sector.

Fears that the industry could see a slowdown due to recent oil and feedstock price hikes and the adoption, in December 2006, of stringent new European rules on the Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals (REACH), aimed at ensuring that importers and producers of chemicals carry out basic health and safety testing for their products (EurActiv 13/12/06), have been further heightened by increasing competition from low-cost emerging economies, such as China, India and the Gulf States.

The group will thus examine how to continue attracting investments towards Europe in view of maintaining current high levels of employment in the sector.

Secondly, the group will seek to identify how to raise the profile of this sector – which, according to the Commission, is often perceived negatively by citizens, despite the fact that it shapes most of their daily lives through its contributions both to traditional sectors such as agriculture, construction, textiles and footwear and to high-tech industries such as automobiles, modern healthcare and electronics.

Lastly, the group will look to adapt this highly energy-intensive sector to the challenges posed by climate change, while taking advantage of its potential to develop energy-saving technologies, including biofuels.

European Commission Vice President Günter Verheugen, who will chair the group, said: "The EU chemicals industry is a world-leader today and makes an enormous contribution to growth and jobs in Europe. However, there are clear signs that it is facing unprecedented challenges both from the effects of global change and the expectations of our citizens. With this initiative we aim to ensure the right framework conditions for the chemicals industry to continue operating and investing in the EU on a sustainable basis."

Source: Euractiv.com