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Recovering more metal and plastics from waste

Pilot project on introduction of recycling bin completed

More household waste in Germany is meant to be recycled in future. To achieve this the Federal Government will step up separation of waste materials and upgrade the yellow bin ("Gelbe Tonne") to a "recycling bin". A higher rate of metals and plastics recovery can then be realised. "Recovery will amount to some 7 kilos of high-grade materials per capita and year, which is currently still disposed of with household residual waste. We cannot afford this waste of raw materials anymore", said Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA). Our economic development can expect to experience bottlenecks in supply of scarce resources more regularly. The final report on the pilot project to extend the Packaging Ordinance, issued today, outlines the parameters of a single system of raw materials recovery, in both a private-sector and a public venture. UBA is calling for introduction of a recycling bin; however, it should not be used to collect waste electrical and electronic materials.

The introduction of a new single recycling bin is aimed at enabling disposal of not only packaging but also everyday items made of plastic and metal - ideally, placed right in the household. Prior to its introduction, the matter of who shall collect these wastes is now under discussion. Two organisational and financing models were developed to take this into consideration. Model A places responsibility entirely in the private sector: financing is guaranteed by manufacturers and suppliers of light packaging and so-called 'comparable non-packaging material'. Specifically, this includes everyday plastic and metal items which fit into a single collection bin, for example toys, cutlery, pots and pans, or plastic buckets. Collection of all wastes will be coordinated with the dual system.

In Model B, responsibility for organising waste collection lies in the hands of municipalities, and financing is provided by both public authorities as well as manufacturers and suppliers. In other words, disposal of light packaging would continue to be paid for by manufacturers and suppliers whereas the costs for non-packaging would be covered by levying a charge. Jochen Flasbarth commented, "Ultimately, ambitious ecological standards must be brought to bear in both models."

Both models were practice-tested in the pilot project to extend the Packaging Ordinance. Participants represented municipal and *Laender* authorities, the waste management industry, manufacturers, trade, and environmental and consumer associations. They discussed how both organisational and finance concepts can be implemented. The results of the pilot project will be presented to the expert public at the Federal Environment Agency in Dessau-Roßlau on 23 September 2011. The experience gained from the pilot project and other research projects about expanding recovery of household recyclable waste will provide the basis for the upcoming legislative process. Concrete regulations will be adopted as either an ordinance or law.

The Federal Environment Agency has voiced approval of the introduction of a single recycling bin. According to an UBA study, recovery of raw materials could be increased by 7 kg per capita and year. Electrical and electronic waste such as used mobile phones or defective household appliances, says UBA, do not belong in such a recycling bin and should continue to be recovered separately. For one, the electrical and electronic materials might contaminate the other recyclables with heavy metals and fire-proofing agents; secondly, high-grade recycling of the old devices themselves would no longer be possible.

More information and links:

Final report on pilot project to extend Packaging Ordinance (in German):
<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4174.html>

Other UBA studies:

On the ideal components of a recycling bin (in German):
<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4074.html>

Financing models for the recycling bin (in German):
<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4077.html>

Evaluation of Packaging Ordinance
<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4072.html>

Dessau-Roßlau, 20 September 2011