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Joint press release with the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU - Deutschland), the Federal Office for the Environment (Switzerland), the Federal Environment Agency (Austria), and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW - Austria)

Three countries act in concert for more protection of natural resources

The ministries and federal offices for environment in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland are strengthening their ties as they aim to step up exchange of knowledge on strategies in sustainable resource management, with a special focus on waste management. The first joint "Re-source 2009" symposium on resources and recycling strategies is scheduled to take place on 23-24 June 2009. It will expose the state of development, obstacles and potential of increasing resource efficiency. The drastically lower yet volatile prices (compared to the previous year) for primary raw materials such as copper ore, as well as secondary raw materials such as steel scrap, can not hide the facts. "As the global economy recovers along with the demand for raw materials in countries like China, India, Brazil or Russia, there will once again be shortages of metals and minerals", said Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Mr Michael Müller, during the opening address of the "Re-source 2009" symposium in Berlin today.

The environmental stress exerted by activities such as extraction and processing of raw materials, land consumption, groundwater and air pollution, will come under greater public scrutiny as the demand for raw materials grows. Symptoms include social problems such as poor working conditions, wage dumping, and health risks in developing countries. In many developing countries the extraction and recycling of raw materials occurs at the lowest of ecological and social standards. At the same time, the ecologically innovative recycling facilities in western industrialised countries often lack materials to recover. "In light of resource scarcity, we face the great challenge of developing our enormous efficiency potential", said Müller.

Efforts to protect the climate have been stepped up in throughout Europe recent years, and the time is ripe to focus attention on sustainable materials and resource management. Germany, Austria, and Switzerland dispose of the progressive technologies and sustainable consumption strategies with which they might lead the way to more efficient use and lower consumption of resources. "Because natural resources are in limited supply, they must be managed efficiently. Sustainable raw materials and resources policies are not feasible without government regulation of markets. Today's economic cycles and flow of goods are global.

There must be a high priority placed on a coordinated approach so as avoid any occurrence of market distortion or competitive disadvantages", said Bruno Oberle, Director of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, during his opening address.

The "Re-source 2009" symposium aims to serve as a forum for expert dialogue on the sustainable use of resources and produce ideas for the development of waste management plans. In so doing every country emphasises different points:

The topics addressed by the German Federal Ministry for Environment and Federal Environment Agency range from recycling strategically critical metals extracted from electronic scrap to the use of secondary raw materials from demolished buildings as man-made deposits (known as "urban mining").

Austria's proposed raw materials plan makes a bold step to resolve conflicts by means of competing demands for land use. Its plan secures the availability of raw materials for future generations. Austria's waste avoidance and recovery strategy promotes increases in efficiency as well as the trend towards the provision of secondary raw materials, which will not only conserve resources but also relieve the load on the environment. "For ecological and economic reasons, a boost in resource efficiency is of colossal importance. Common standards in waste processing are needed to relieve the strain on the environment, and compliance with these standards must be monitored at the national and international level. It is also our desire to raise the public's awareness of the issues and encourage more efficient handling of energy and raw materials", Dr. Reinhard Mang, Secretary-General of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, pointed out.

The Swiss Federal Office for the Environment has been active in the area of sustainable consumption and labels for years. It recognises and promotes ecological product assessment methods and advocates their use. Therefore, Switzerland will head the talks on sustainable production and consumption patterns and their impact on material streams.

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