EUROPEAN SUPPLIERS OF WASTE-TO-ENERGY TECHNOLOGY

ESWET welcomes the Circular Economy Package

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ESWET welcomes this revised proposal that is in-line with Waste Management realities. Rightly so, the Commission did not present any measures to limit quantities of waste that may undergo Energy Recovery activities, since Waste-to-Energy is the necessary buffer between higher recycling and lower landfilling. ESWET calls on the other EU Institutions to also refrain from introducing incineration bans, caps, limitations or restrictions.

At the same time, ESWET would have hoped for more ambition to minimise landfilling of untreated municipal waste, but the proposal is a step in the right direction. Most importantly, the new proposal enables Member States to count metals recycled from Waste-to-Energy residues, thus helping increasing recycling rates while helping to minimise landfilling.

About Waste-to-Energy

A technology complementary to recycling, Waste-to-Energy handles waste that cannot be recycled and would otherwise be landfilled – residual waste. Plants combust the waste while treating combustion gases to ensure minimal emissions, well below the strict EU requirements. Residual waste contains energy, which is recovered and made usable as electricity and/or heat. Waste-to-Energy plays a role within the Energy Union, helping to secure energy supplies while contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Waste-to-Energy's role in the Waste Hierarchy

Efficient Waste-to-Energy plants are ranked 4th in the waste hierarchy, complementing recycling and are preferred to landfilling. Eventually, almost any waste becomes technically unrecyclable. It is necessary that a safe, efficient option exists for its treatment, and since landfilling must at the same time be minimised, Waste-to-Energy plants are expected to close the loop.

Any limitation put onto energy recovery means continued landfilling. Waste that cannot be recycled will continue to exist and if Waste-to-Energy plants are not allowed to recover its energy, this waste will be landfilled.

ESWET welcomes the emphasis on waste reduction and re-use, the highest steps of the hierarchy. Creating jobs and enhancing resource-efficiency through re-use activities is already occurring, and a clearer framework will help bolstering waste avoidance.

ESWET is happy to see that its call for quality recycling has been taken up. We support that the "final recycling process" asks for a re-processing of waste into products, materials or substances, which means that the input waste must be suitable for recycling. It is important that quality, usefulness, and market realities drive the pull for recyclates, thus bringing more waste higher up in the waste hierarchy.

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Minimising landfilling of municipal waste as soon as possible
The minimisation of municipal waste landfilling is something which is already a reality in many Member States. A clear message to decrease landfilling is included in this package, but the lead times and actual "landfilling ceiling" are too shy for a truly Circular Economy. European Member States can do better than 10% landfilling of municipal waste: we must make sure that we bury nothing containing recoverable energy.

We must decrease landfilling by selling more waste to final recycling processes and using the residual waste for energy. We hope that Member States will not stop at the 10% threshold and will pursue genuine minimisation of landfilling. Perhaps such a message could be included by fellow EU Institutions when reviewing the package.

Recognising Waste-to-Energy's role in metal recycling
Residual waste contains energy and materials. In many cases, metals are mixed in unrecyclable products that also contain energy carriers such as wood, plastic or textiles. Both the energy and metals have been recovered in Waste-to-Energy plants for decades. Hundreds of thousands of tonnes of metals coming from municipal waste are recycled in the EU through treatment of bottom ash, and there is scope to extract valuable metals from flue gas cleaning residues as well.

ESWET is delighted that this metal recycling from Waste-to-Energy residues will finally be counted towards EU municipal waste recycling targets.

In Germany, 460,000 tonnes of ferrous metals and 58,000 tonnes of non-ferrous metals were thus recycled in 2013[1]. That same year, in Belgium, 40% of metal packaging recycled was extracted from Waste-to-Energy plants' bottom ash[2]. In the Netherlands, in 2014, over 112,000 tonnes of ferrous metals and 25,000 tonnes of non-ferrous metals were also recovered[3]. Those are only a few examples of the contribution of Waste-to-Energy towards closing the loop for some of the most valuable materials to be part of the Circular Economy.

Waste-to-Energy can help reach the higher recycling targets, while being an important supplier of energy, and is indispensable to achieving the landfill reduction obligations.

About ESWET
ESWET is the association grouping the European Suppliers of Waste-to-Energy Technology. Its members have supplied over 95% of European Waste-to-Energy plants. ESWET aims to raise the awareness of the positive contribution of the technology for the environment, energy supplies and resource-efficiency.

[1] https://www.itad.de/jahresbericht/ITADJahresbericht2013_Daten.pdf
[2] https://www.fostplus.be/download/1575/jaarverslag_fost_plus_2014.pdf or https://www.fostplus.be/download/1703/rapport_annuel_fost_plus_2014.pdf p.6
[3] http://www.verenigingafvalbedrijven.nl/publicaties/download/reststoffen-2014-juli-2015pdf.html

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