



Info

Batteries to be collected and recycled, nature protected

After two years of negotiation, MEPs approved a directive which will ensure that schemes for collecting spent portable batteries and accumulators are set up throughout Europe by 2008. Only six Member States currently have such schemes. Collected batteries will be recycled. Strict limits to the content of cadmium and mercury in batteries have also been fixed, as these substances are harmful to the environment and health.

"This is the sixth piece of legislation we have agreed under conciliation in this parliamentary term", said Dagmar Roth-Behrendt (PES, DE), who led the European Parliament delegation. "Once more Parliament has managed to improve the draft legislation a great deal. There was a constructive spirit of negotiation on both sides, in the Parliament and the Council. This new directive will help consumers to consume more intelligently and producers to reduce pollution, such as mercury, cadmium and lead, from the products they sell".

Karl-Heinz Florenz (EPP-ED, DE), chair of Parliament's Environment Committee, pointed out that "there can be no recycling without collection. Collection schemes and the requirement for distributors to take back waste batteries are the key points of this directive, in my view. Another important point is the registration of producers using similar procedures in all Member States. That should prevent us having the same problems as those we now have with the directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment".

Target of 45%

In 2002 the collection rates of portable batteries in the six countries which have already set up schemes were: Belgium 59%, Sweden 55%, Austria 44%, Germany 39%, the Netherlands 32% and France 16%. The new directive lays down minimum collection rates to be reached by all Member States: 25% by 2012 and 45 % by 2016.

Everything will depend on the quality of the schemes set up, the information provided to consumers and the willingness of the latter to play their part. Things will be much easier now for consumers: labels will have to indicate the real capacity of the batteries and accumulators they buy.

In the view of Johannes Blokland (IND/DEM, NL), who drafted Parliament's report on the directive, this represents important progress: "This provision was not in the original proposal but Parliament thought the consumer should be able to choose higher-performance and long-life batteries. Cheap batteries are not necessarily the best choice for the environment if they have a shorter life. As of 2009, labels on all batteries and accumulators must show their real capacity."

Other points of the directive

Entry into force and transposition: The directive enters into force on the day it is published in the Official Journal (in the course of 2006) and the Member States have two years to transpose it into national law.

Bans: The directive bans the sale of batteries and accumulators containing more than 0.0005% of mercury and 0.002% of cadmium, except emergency and alarm systems, medical equipment and cordless power tools.

Collection schemes: Easily accessible collection points must be available to consumers in their own neighbourhood two years after the directive enters into force (2008). Thanks to Parliament, distributors will have to take back the spent portable batteries and accumulators at no cost to the consumer and regardless of when they were placed on the market. And they must inform consumers that this possibility exists.

Information: Producers must bear any net costs of information campaigns.

Registration: All producers must be registered and, at Parliament's insistence, this must be done under similar procedures in all Member States, to ensure producers cannot duck their responsibilities.

Exemptions: Parliament has sharply reduced the possible exemptions from the rules on collection and recycling that Member States wanted for small producers. These exemptions will be subject to strict conditions regarding compliance with competition rules.

Recycling rates: The targets laid down in the directive for recycling are 65% by average weight for lead-acid batteries and accumulators, 75% for nickel-cadmium and 50% for others.

Removability: At Parliament's insistence, manufacturers will have to design appliances in such a way that spent batteries and accumulators can be easily removed.

Research: The EP has added provisions to the directive to encourage research into better technologies for recycling and for manufacturing less polluting batteries.