‘Secondary raw materials’ are recycled materials that can be used in manufacturing processes instead of or alongside virgin raw materials. The use of secondary raw materials presents a number of advantages, including increased security of supply, reduced material and energy use, reduced impacts on the climate and the environment, and reduced manufacturing costs. However, the use of secondary raw materials faces a number of barriers, including the absence of EU-wide quality standards for certain materials (such as plastics), difficulties linked to the trading of secondary raw materials across the EU, and potential presence of chemicals of concern in recycled materials.

As part of its ‘circular economy’ package put forward in December 2015, the European Commission presented an action plan for the circular economy. In the action plan, the Commission pledged specifically to undertake the following actions:

- develop quality standards for secondary raw materials, in particular for plastics (from 2016 onwards);
- analyse policy options to address the interface between chemicals, products and waste legislation, including how to reduce the presence and improve the tracking of chemicals of concern in products (by 2017);
- take measures to facilitate waste shipment across the EU, including electronic data exchange (from 2016 onwards);
- further develop the EU raw materials information system (from 2016 onwards).

The European Commission has carried out the following actions:

- taking measures to support the enforcement of the waste shipment regulation;
- developing the raw materials information system;
- publishing a communication laying out a strategy for plastics in a circular economy; and
- publishing a communication analysing options to address the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation.

In its resolution of 9 July 2015 on ‘resource efficiency: moving towards a circular economy’, the European Parliament called on the Commission to ‘develop measures to incentivise and facilitate the development of markets for high-quality secondary raw materials and the development of business based on the reuse of secondary raw materials’.
In its resolution of 13 September 2011 on an effective raw materials strategy for Europe, the European Parliament urged the Commission to investigate and promote projects on urban mining, as a large part of valuable secondary raw materials can be extracted, re-used and recycled, and to invest in projects that generally reduce the use of raw materials.

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