



Tackling the EU's e-waste mountain

Committees: Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

EU Member States should be obliged to collect and recycle more discarded fridges, phones and other e-waste, said the Environment Committee on Tuesday. MEPs want to make it easier for consumers to return small products and harder for unscrupulous operators to ship e-waste illegally out of the EU.

The Environment Committee's near-unanimous second reading vote (52 in favour, 1 against and 5 abstentions) concerns changes to the current waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) Directive. A plenary vote is currently planned for January 2012, to allow negotiations with Council.

"Collecting and recycling e-waste is good for the environment and good for the economy. Parliament's ambitious but achievable targets will help recover valuable raw materials and cut the flow of e-waste to landfills, incinerators and developing countries," said rapporteur Karl-Heinz Florenz (EPP, DE).

Collection targets

MEPs say targets should be based on actual e-waste generated, with 85% to be collected by 2016. Council supports a 65% target based on goods going on sale, to be phased in to most EU countries by 2020 and the remainder by 2022. A flat-rate annual target of 4kg per person is currently applied.

Many smaller e-waste items are thrown away with other rubbish even though they contain harmful or valuable substances. To tackle the problem, MEPs say consumers should be allowed to hand in very small appliances to all but the smallest electrical goods shops for free. This would offer a useful alternative to the dedicated facilities that already accept domestic e-waste without charge.

Recover, recycle and reuse

Depending on the category, MEPs say 70-85% of e-waste should be recovered and 50-75% recycled. They propose a separate 5% reuse target so that more functional goods get a new lease of life instead of being scrapped.

Red tape

MEPs say producers and consumers should bear the costs of e-waste, not the general taxpayer. But more should be done to cut out unnecessary administrative burdens and costs faced by companies. For example, distance sellers should be able to report data to a central EU system, to avoid the extra red tape and expense of signing up for multiple national registers.

Illegal shipments

Large amounts of the EU's e-waste are being illegally exported to countries, notably in Asia and Africa, where processing may fail to respect workers' health and the environment. MEPs therefore want to shift the burden of proof to exporters to ensure their shipments to non-OECD countries contain only reusable goods, and no waste.

Press release

In the Chair: Jo Leinen (S&D, DE)

Contact :

Christopher COAKLEY

BXL: (+32) 2 28 44859

STR: (+33) 3 881 76853

PORT: (+32) 498 98 33 26

EMAIL: envi-press@europarl.europa.eu