

Commission to consider EPR at EU level

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The European Commission “could start a dialogue” on how extended producer responsibility at an EU level could look like, DG Environment's Kurt Vandenberghe has said – a few weeks before a club dedicated to EPR was set up (see story below).

He told Belgian green dot scheme Fost Plus's General Assembly that it was however too early to say if EPR could exist at an EU level. “We can't have a specific model yet,” he told last month's meeting in Brussels. “We must get this aim in an integrated way. We could have a more universal model for a green dot system, but we can't impose it right now.”

Vandenberghe spoke out following Fost Plus's comments earlier that day that if the Commission was looking at taking the first steps towards defining best practice in terms of EPR, “Fost Plus would like to believe it and will do as much as possible to defend the model that it has developed and can be judged as a ‘success story’.”

Vandenberghe said that in general, “I don't want a top down policy, I don't want imposition. We need to look at all actors and have everything going in the same direction to have a coherent policy.”

Landfilling should cost

Vandenberghe said that a coherent waste policy would not have much sense if you have landfill and incineration costing nothing, “these must be expensive options, we will examine the fiscal economics on this.

“The Commission is due to adopt a paper on economic instruments to permit a more environmental economy. The aim is to make prices realistic and to eliminate harmful subsidies. We want to tax less what we earn and more what we burn.”

On landfill, he said that work needed to be done to change a situation where, while the average recycling rate has increased from 30 to 40 per cent and the landfill rate has decreased from 50 to 40 per cent, “there are very big differences. Some member states recycle 70 per cent and have no landfill, others are quite the opposite. And the results in terms of waste prevention are far too modest, in the light of the challenges that are there.”

Coherence moreover meant integrating “green” in all sectors, such as the Common Agricultural Policy to help the circular economy. Resource efficiency was also a priority in research and innovation programmes.

No waste possible

The DG Environment official further said that the “no waste or emissions” dream was possible. “This would not be deindustrialisation but dematerialisation. It is a very good dream to have lots of very clean companies; we do not mean no industry.”

He said that as well as eliminating landfill, the drive to have more waste prevention policies, with member states needing to draw up waste prevention programmes for 2013 and better raw materials markets, was essential.

Other key priorities outlined in the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe were to achieve:

- better implementation of existing legislation rather than adding new rules;
- better protection and restoration of biodiversity; and,
- projection of the resource efficiency agenda at an international level – notably at the Rio+20 summit dedicated to the economy and green growth where the EU will propose worldwide aims on waste management.

“The Belgian experience shows,” Vandenberghe said, referring to Fost Plus's successful recycling and recovery results, “that the aim fixed by the European Union of becoming a resource efficient economy is not a costly dream but a vision and a realistic and achievable agenda.