

## ISOPA commits to the circular economy

***Europe must stop wasting its resources! Improving waste management is a good way to start. For ISOPA, Europe cannot hope to transition towards a circular economy model without an ambitious yet practical waste management policy.***

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As Europe faces unprecedented economic, social, environmental and geopolitical challenges, political leaders seem to agree on one thing: our society must move away from the linear model and transition towards a circular economy. Europe must stop wasting resources!

A paradigm change of such dimension requires a holistic approach and commitment from everyone. ISOPA – and the polyurethanes (PU) industry at large – strongly commits to engage and contribute to the debate. For decades, the PU value chain has been developing resource-efficient solutions benefiting a myriad of sectors that will play a key role in contributing to a circular economy in Europe (construction, transport, appliances, etc.).

Thanks to this experience, ISOPA would like to share thoughts on how improved waste management can deliver Europe's objectives.

### LANDFILLING OF PLASTICS IS OBSOLETE

Plastics are too valuable to waste and must be diverted from landfill. In order to do so, Member States should promote sustainable reuse and recycling solutions as well as high-efficiency waste-to-energy capacities. Europe will move away from landfilling by combined investments in recycling and energy recovery. As data shows in several countries<sup>1</sup>, high recycling rates associated with high waste-to-energy rates have allowed for a progressive phase out of landfilling of plastic waste.

### RECYCLING MUST BE SUSTAINABLE

Europe will not shift towards a more circular model unless recycling rates increase significantly. It is, however, critical to promote sustainable recycling. Recycling makes sense provided there is waste of sufficient quantity and quality and that the logistics and processes involved do not impose a higher environmental and economic burden. Mixed or contaminated waste as well as the lack of sustained waste streams could create obstacles: excessive environmental or economic costs, unsafe recycling, etc. Homogenous packaging materials, such as PET, create a good example of sustainable recycling: the flow of waste is constant and the collection and separation schemes are well-established. Alternative and complementary waste management options are also needed.

### WASTE TO ENERGY IS NEEDED

Regulation should also support energy recovery solutions for two very simple reasons: they provide an alternative to recycling when it is not deemed sustainable and help strengthen Europe's energy independence. In that vein, ISOPA strongly supports proposed waste-to-energy initiatives as they constitute a domestic source of energy and reduce the use of virgin resources.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Waste\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Waste_statistics)

## SUPPORT FEEDSTOCK RECYCLING

Feedstock recycling is a process by which waste is broken down into its individual chemical components which can be fed back as raw material. Originally introduced by the plastics industry, the concept constitutes an attractive option for plastics that are difficult to mechanically recycle. Processes such as gasification or pyrolysis break down plastic waste into new chemical raw materials; they can then be used in a variety of applications<sup>2</sup>. Past experience in feedstock recycling has shown that while innovation leads to effective and robust new technologies, these technologies can face economic challenges preventing their development and implementation at an industrial scale. Further innovation and funding are therefore needed in order to turn feedstock recycling into an economically viable option and create new opportunities to close the carbon loop.

## SECURE FLEXIBLE EXTENDED PRODUCERS' RESPONSIBILITY SCHEMES

Waste management differs from one waste stream to the next. Therefore, (Extended) Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes established for one category of waste might not be applicable and could even be counterproductive for others.

The modulation of EPR fees based on product's reusability and recyclability discriminates against innovative and more resource-efficient products. In some cases indeed, reusability and recyclability are not the most resource efficient options. Instead, EPR schemes should focus only on the real end-of-life costs, and the priority of actions should focus on waste prevention and products' impact throughout their life cycle.

In doing so, regulation will deliver on environmental objectives without imposing a significant financial burden on companies operating across the value chain.

## CONCLUSION: SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT NEEDS A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH

Waste streams require specific treatment as they are associated to specific challenges: paper cannot be treated like plastics and packaging cannot be treated like construction waste. Applying the waste hierarchy therefore requires to implement waste management options cleverly in order to deliver the best overall environmental outcome, i.e. taking a life-cycle perspective.

With this in mind, one should consider the following:

- Banning disposal of waste is key to guarantee resources are not lost
- Sustainable recycling allows society to maximise the value of our resource while avoiding unnecessary environmental or economic costs
- Waste-to-energy and feedstock recycling will be essential to managing waste containing hazardous impurities and to extract resources from waste streams that are difficult to collect, separate and recycle
- Resource efficiency requires a life cycle approach. All stages of products' life span must be taken into consideration

With all these tools at hand, let's stop wasting our resources!

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.plasticseurope.org/plastics-sustainability-14017/zero-plastics-to-landfill/feedstock-recycling.aspx>

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