



European
Commission

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Closing the loop

FROM WASTE TO RESOURCES

Recycling is a precondition for a circular economy – resources and materials can be recycled, returned back to the economy and used again. What was once considered as waste can become a valuable resource. To realise the potential of these so called secondary raw materials, we have to remove the existing barriers to their trade, improve the waste management practices and guarantee high quality standards. Only then can industry make full use of secondary raw materials and help ensure their secure supply.

RECOVERING AND RECYCLING MATERIALS

In a circular economy, materials from products at the end of their lifecycle should be recovered through dismantling and recycling. Re-injecting these materials into the beginning of the product lifecycle reduces environmental impact and costs of production. We are proposing a number of tools to encourage and help this process.

TRADING IN SECONDARY RAW MATERIALS

The market and the EU single market for recovered and waste materials are still underdeveloped. While 45% of waste material from large companies is resold, this figure falls to only 25% for SMEs. We want to create common standards and market tools to improve this.

KEY COMMISSION PROPOSALS

- **QUALITY STANDARDS** - the lack of adequate tools to ensure the quality of secondary raw materials is a barrier to their take-up in the EU economy. Common standards are needed to build and support trade. The Commission will develop such standards where needed.
- **COMMON RULES ON FERTILIZERS** – diverging rules and standards hamper the manufacturing of organic and waste-based fertilisers from inputs such as food waste, sewage sludge or manure. The Commission will revise the EU regulation on fertilizers to help develop an EU-wide market for bio-nutrients while ensuring safety and quality of the EU Fertilisers.
- **USING WATER AGAIN** – reuse of treated wastewater is a promising and under-exploited option in Europe. This can alleviate pressure on natural resources that are already scarce, and the reuse of water in agriculture also contributes to nutrients recycling. The Commission will take a series of actions to encourage the reuse of treated waste water, including legislation on minimum requirements for water reuse.
- **PLASTIC AS A RECYCLABLE RESOURCE** – smart design and proper sorting can increase the recycling rates of plastics and avoid landfilling, incineration and use of virgin materials. The Commission will elaborate a strategy addressing issues such as recyclability, biodegradability, the presence of hazardous substances of concern in certain plastics, and marine litter.
- **USE OF CHEMICALS FITTING THE CIRCULAR MODEL** – to increase safety, facilitate recycling and improve the trust in and uptake of secondary raw materials, the Commission will promote nontoxic material cycles involving less and better traced chemicals of concern. The Commission will also examine how chemicals, products and waste legislation can best work together, including proposals to improve the tracking of chemicals of concern in products.
- **CROSS-BORDER TRADE** – to facilitate the cross-border circulation of secondary raw materials, the Commission will simplify cross-border formalities through the use of electronic data exchange. It will also support an EU-wide research on raw material flows through the Raw Materials Information System.

WHO WILL BENEFIT?

Clear rules, common standards and support for the use of more secondary raw materials will create a safe and sustainable supply of raw materials to the industry. This helps create new jobs, supports innovation and boosts competitiveness. Improved waste management rules will reduce landfill and tipping fees. Smarter use of resources is not only good for business, but will also help protect the environment preserve essential resources for current and future generations, and create synergies for industries which most depend on it – such as tourism, agriculture and food manufacturing.

