

Press Kit

Launch of the report
“The potential
contribution of waste
management to a low
carbon economy”

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PRESS RELEASE

Municipal Solid Waste: a Key Sector for a Low-Carbon Economy, New Report Finds.

A newly released report has found the waste sector has a key role to play in the development of a low carbon economy and the reduction of greenhouse gases (GHGs).¹ The report will be launched at a press conference, organised by Zero Waste France in Paris on Tuesday the 27th.² This report comes in advance of the UN Climate Conference in Paris, which will take place in December.

The report was commissioned by Zero Waste Europe, in partnership with Zero Waste France and ACR+. The report finds that the role of waste prevention and improved waste management can play in reducing GHG emissions and the development of a low carbon economy has previously been significantly understated, partly due to the structure of the national inventories of the UNFCCC.³

The report further provides an accurate examination of the true impact of waste management on climate change and carbon emissions. It confirms that actions at the top of the waste hierarchy – including waste prevention initiatives, reuse and recycling - have considerable scope to reduce climate change emissions.

As the report states *“A climate friendly strategy, as regards materials and waste, will be one in which materials are continually cycling through the economy, and where the leakage of materials into residual waste treatments is minimised”*. For example, recycling 1 tonne of plastic packaging can be a saving of 500 kg CO₂ eq, whereas using one tonne less plastic packaging results in avoiding 6 times more emissions (3 tonnes CO₂ eq).

In the report 11 key recommendations are made, calling for waste policies to be redesigned in order to prioritise the higher level options of the ‘Waste Hierarchy’ (waste prevention, reuse and recycling) and immediately reallocate climate finance subsidies which are currently supporting energy generation from waste. These recommendations put a strong focus on correcting methodological issues that are currently preventing Member states and the European union from implementing waste policies that are efficient in terms of GHG emissions.

The report shows that in the decarbonising economy required to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, technologies such as incineration will become less attractive options and ultimately present an obstacle to a low carbon economy.

Mariel Vilella, Zero Waste Europe’s Associate Director and Head of the Climate Policy Programme said: *“For far too long the climate impact of waste management has been overlooked. Now it’s clear that waste prevention, reuse and recycling are climate change solutions that need to be fully integrated into a low carbon economy. Both at the EU and international level, it is time to shift climate finance support to these climate-friendly options instead of waste incineration, which in fact contributes to climate change and displaces livelihoods of recyclers worldwide.”*

¹ Download The executive summary - The full report - The Appendices

² [More information about the event](#)

³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Delphine Lévi Alvarès, Zero Waste France's Advocacy Officer, said: *"With France hosting the COP21 in December, it is a real opportunity to raise decision makers' awareness about the real impact of waste management on climate change and the extent to which Zero Waste strategies have to be put on the agenda of solutions to climate mitigation supported by the French government."*

Françoise Bonnet, Secretary general of ACR+ said: *"Efficiency and smart waste management is key for a low carbon economy. Still, it is only the tip of the iceberg as a much bigger impact can be achieved through resource efficiency and adopting a life-cycle perspective"*.

ENDS

[Download the Executive summary - The full report - The technical appendices](#)

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THE PARTNERS



Zero Waste Europe – Zero Waste Europe is an umbrella organisation empowering communities to rethink their relationship with resources. It brings together local Zero Waste groups and municipalities present in 20 EU countries. Beyond recycling, the Zero Waste network aims at reducing waste generation, close the material loop whilst increasing employment and designing waste out of the system. www.zerowasteurope.eu



Zero Waste France (formerly Cniid - Centre national d'information indépendante sur les déchets) was founded in 1997. As an independently funded NGO and a member of Zero Waste Europe, it has been advocating for waste reduction since then, talking to local and national public officials as well as citizens groups or businesses. In 2014 the organization changed its name to Zero Waste France to emphasize its ambition but also the links with the other groups involved in this issue worldwide. Zero Waste France works closely with local stakeholders – among them its 2,000 members (individuals and groups) to encourage and implement Zero Waste strategies at the local level. www.zerowasteFrance.org



ACR+ – The Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling and sustainable Resource management (ACR+) is an international network promoting sustainable resource management through prevention at source, reuse and recycling. Through its activities, ACR+ strives to develop the expertise and skills of public authorities in effective waste-product-resource policies. Building on a 20 year experience, ACR+ launched in November 2014, the Circular Europe Network, a multi-stakeholder platform aiming at supporting local and regional authorities in adopting aspiring circular economy strategies. www.acrplus.org

WHY THIS REPORT?

Between November 30th and December 11th 2015, delegates from across the world will gather in Paris to negotiate a new climate agreement aimed at replacing the Kyoto Protocol. The parties to the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are progressively publishing their pledges in terms of greenhouse gas emission reductions which are supposed to limit global warming to under 2°C. Among the many possible climate change mitigation solutions that are emphasised, one that is consistently underestimated is the significance of waste management strategies.

One reason for this is that the 'waste' section of the national inventories to the UNFCCC does not take into account most of the emissions from this sector. Emissions reported under this section mainly concern methane emissions from landfills. All the emissions related to the transport of waste and incineration with energy recovery are respectively reported under the transport and energy sections.

Moreover, in this reporting, biogenic CO₂ emissions (resulting in the combustion or aerobic degradation of carbon from organic sources) are not accounted for, because they are considered by the IPCC as carbon neutral. This assumption leads to energy-from-waste enjoying a "renewable energy" status, and accounted for a "benefit", even though they contribute to climate change. The climate impacts of the waste sector are therefore considered to count only for 3% of the EU emissions. However, if we take into account all the impacts of the sector this figure is far more significant, and the potential of GHG reduction through waste prevention, reuse and recycling are much bigger than the actual emissions of the whole sector. Benefits from waste prevention and recycling policies will therefore be seen only as an emission differential in the industry (for manufactured goods) or agriculture (for food) sections of the inventories to the CCNUCC, and not accounted for as a mitigation action of the waste policies.

Despite there being a wide consensus that the greatest GHG emission reductions can be made through waste prevention and recycling, several policies and climate finance mechanisms are still effectively driving investment and providing economic advantage to waste disposal. This is the case of the Renewable Energy subsidies which tend to favor the generation of energy from waste incineration (page 9 in the report), which in fact contributes to climate change rather than helps to prevent it.

The reality in the international climate finance scenario is no different. Where waste management is concerned, rich countries providing resources to the Global South in response to their UNFCCC commitments tend to commit to investments at the lower end of the waste hierarchy. The present report contributes to other recent publications that have tried to encourage rich countries to 'get climate finance right'.

In advance of a global agreement to keep the world temperature below 2°C, every party to the UNFCCC should be expected not only to commit to an emission reduction target but also a transition plan that could effectively build a low-carbon economy. This is probably the most important challenge that any government or community is facing in this decade. How can we do that? This reports aims to answer that question.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Waste policies should be designed to manage waste in the upper tiers of the waste hierarchy (i.e. recycling or above)

Generally, waste policies that move waste increasingly into the upper tiers of the waste hierarchy are likely to be beneficial for climate change. Simply switching from landfill to incineration is likely to limit climate change benefits, and even a worsening of emissions where energy sources are becoming decarbonised. Every effort should be put on waste prevention, reuse, and recycling, as they can play a significant mitigation role.

Recommendation 2: Indicators of waste management performance should shift from ‘how much is landfilled?’ to ‘how much residual waste is generated?’

One of the key indicators that has been used by DG Environment, Eurostat and the EEA to assess waste management performance is the amount of waste landfilled, with lower figures being deemed indicative of superior performance. However, a low landfill rate does not imply a low production of waste and a high recycling rate. Furthermore, even if it was the case, the analysis developed in the report shows that landfills do not necessarily perform less well than all other options. This indicator can also trigger perverse effects, as countries will be tempted to invest in capital-intensive residual treatments, often leading to incineration overcapacities. Shifting to a focus on residual waste would also help Member States focus their attention on moving waste into the upper tiers of the waste hierarchy.

Recommendation 3: The implementation of blanket bans on the landfilling of waste should be resisted, as they are generally not enforceable. The focus should be on measures to encourage, or mandate, the separation of waste for preparation for reuse or recycling.

Total landfill bans may have counterproductive effects since they tend to develop incineration capacities which can turn rapidly into overcapacities or keep countries locked into low recycling rates. Rather than encouraging specific landfill bans for certain materials, source separation for preparation for reuse or recycling should be the priority, and would necessarily trigger a decrease of residual waste landfilled and incinerated.

Recommendation 4: Member States should immediately discontinue support for all forms of energy from residual waste, including implicit subsidies.

Given that part of the rationale for developing renewable sources of energy is to address climate change, it seems counterproductive to maintain support for those which contribute to climate change. The case for supporting measures for the generation of energy from waste on the basis that waste is ‘a renewable resource’ makes no sense when set against the waste hierarchy. As countries improve in their prevention, reuse, and recycling, so less and less residual waste will be available. It is stretching the definition of ‘renewable’ beyond what is credible to argue that residual waste could be a source of ‘renewable’ energy.

Recommendation 5: Every subsidy for the utilisation, directly, of harvested biomass for renewable energy generation / renewable fuels should be withdrawn.

In a world where there will be increasing pressure on land, it must surely be questionable to use biomass directly for energy when the land used to grow it could be used for food, or for manufacturing prior to the resulting waste materials being recycled. Only when waste materials are ‘leaking’ from the system, or when food waste is being digested, should they be used for energy generation, and no subsidies should be attributed to use of primary biomass for energy purposes.

Recommendation 6: Consideration needs to be given as to how to integrate ‘waste’ within the framework of European policies to tackle climate change.

One way would be to consider its integration within the EU-ETS. Another would be to consider reinforcing the Effort Sharing Decision, making GHG emission reduction targets with appropriate ambition for the waste sector. Particular attention would need to be paid to ensuring the benefits of recycling and reuse were adequately recognised, even where the recycling and reuse took place in other countries.

Recommendation 7: In the short-term, and in the absence of a move to consumption-based inventories to the UNFCCC, it would be helpful to include:

- o as an addendum to the 'waste' section of the inventory, the estimated GHG effects of recycling (including where materials collected for recycling are exported), and
- o in the Industry chapter, the extent to which industries make use of recycled materials (and the implied level of emissions saving).

Recommendation 8: Recognising the uncertainty associated with the way in which emissions from the AFOLU (agriculture, forestry and other land use) Sector are accounted for, inventories should include emissions of biogenic CO2 from incineration (and biomass power plants) until such time as the accounting methods have across countries been assessed in terms of the adequacy of the treatment of this matter.

Recommendation 9: All life cycle studies engaged in comparative assessments of waste treatments should incorporate CO2 emissions from non-fossil sources in their comparative assessment.

The argument that CO2 from biogenic sources is all 'short-cycle', and so, can be ignored, is tantamount to assuming a separation in the pools of carbon dioxide from fossil and non-fossil sources. It is as though the argument runs that the climate only changes if emissions of CO2 come from fossil sources. This is so obviously wrong that it seems genuinely surprising that this argument could ever have been considered acceptable: in a comparative assessment of the contribution of waste management alternatives to climate change, the only correct way to proceed is to account for emissions (and sinks, if this is applicable) of all greenhouse gases since they will all have 'warming potential', irrespective of their origin.

Recommendation 10: In the longer term, it would be preferable to move towards consumption based inventories.

Inventories based on production completely underestimate the global impact of a country's consumption, as many emissions occur abroad, where the goods are produced. In this respect, consumption based inventories would be much more effective at reflecting the GHG impact of EU countries and taking responsibility for all the emissions they are generating. The emissions for the EU-27 from 2009 using the production based approach have been assessed to be 4,059 million tonnes CO2 equivalent, whilst the equivalent figure using their consumption-based approach was 4,823 million tonnes CO2 equivalent.

Despite the uncertainties of this method which would require countries to put efforts in data collection, it would be a good way to force them to collaborate to mitigate their emissions, as emissions reduction in one country could trigger a rise in another one if the consumption and production systems are not made sustainable.

Recommendation 11: Regional funds (and funding from international financial institutions) urgently need to reconsider their funding of waste management projects.

The more capital intense waste management options lie closer to the bottom of the waste management hierarchy than the top. The tendency for those engaged in funding organisations, on the other hand, is to see disbursement of capital as a key indicator of success. In such a situation, large amounts of capital can create as many problems as it solves. Whilst it is one thing for private capital to back specific projects, those disbursing regional funds, and the international financial institutions, need to develop innovative models of funding that facilitate projects for prevention, reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling rather than residual waste treatments. The lack of innovation in this regard is extremely disappointing, not least given the limited climate change benefits that are achieved through such projects (notwithstanding the claims made for them).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Programme of the launch conference in Paris - 27 October 2015



en partenariat avec



Défi climatique : pourquoi miser sur la gestion des déchets?

27 octobre 2015 - Paris

• **18.30 Introduction du contexte européen et international de la politique déchets dans les négociations climatiques**
Joan Marc Simon, Directeur - Zero Waste Europe

• **19.00 Présentation des conclusions du rapport** "La contribution potentielle de la gestion des déchets à une économie bas carbone" *Delphine Lévi Alvarès, Responsable du plaidoyer et des relations institutionnelles - Zero Waste France*

• **19.30 Table-ronde** animée par Stéphanie Senet, Journal de l'environnement

Sabine Buis, Députée de l'Ardèche

Ronan Dantec, Sénateur de Loire Atlantique

Evelyne Didier, Sénatrice de Meurthe-et-Moselle

Guillaume Delbar, Maire de Roubaix et Vice-président de Lille Métropole

• **20.30 Clôture des débats**

Laurent Michel, Directeur général de l'énergie et du climat - Ministère de l'écologie, du développement durable et de l'énergie

Baptiste Legay, Chef du département politique de gestion des déchets - Ministère de l'écologie, du développement durable et de l'énergie

ESPACE SUPERPUBLIC
4 RUE DE LA VACQUERIE
75011 PARIS



Programme of the launch conference in Brussels - 24 November 2015
An event organised in the framework of the European Week for Waste Reduction



The Potential of the Waste Sector to a Low Carbon Economy
24 November 2015 - Brussels

Note: This is a draft programme. The organizers reserve the right to make changes to the programme.

- **14H00: Registrations**
- **14H15 – 14H25: Opening speech** by *Michel Lebrun* (Committee of the Regions)
- **14H25 – 14H35: Presentation of the European Week for Waste Reduction** | ACR+
- **14H35-15H05: Presentation of the Waste and Climate Report** | *Eunomia*
- **15H05 – 15H15: Presentation of the waste and climate policy agenda** | *Zero Waste Europe*
- **15H15 – 15H45: Examples from European regional and local authorities** engaged towards a low carbon economy
Porto (PT) Filipe Carneiro, LIPOR
Ljubljana (SI) - tbc
- **15H45 – 16H30: Panel debate: “How to transform the EU into a Low Carbon Economy”**
Julio GARCIA BURGUES | European Commission, DG Environment
Tom VAN IERLAND | European Commission, DG Climate Action
Claire ROUMET | Energy Cities
Moderator: *Françoise BONNET* | ACR+
- **16H30 – 16H45: Questions & Answers**
- **16H45 – 17H00: Closing remarks**
- **17H00 – 17H30: Networking session** (including small refreshments)

COMMITTEE OF REGIONS
BÂTIMENT JACQUES DELORS
RUE BELLIARD 99-101
B - 1040 BRUSSELS

Programme of the international conference on Zero Waste and Climate change - 3 December 2015



“Zero Waste: A Key Solution Pathway for a Low Carbon Future” 3 December - Paris

Note: This is a draft programme. The organisers reserve the right to make changes to the programme.

• 9.00 Opening

Ségolène Royal, French Minister of environment (tbc)

Flore Berlingen, Director - Zero Waste France

• 9.30 Presentation of the report “The Potential Contribution of Waste Management to a Low Carbon Economy”

Dominic Hogg, Chairman - Eunomia Research & Consulting

• 10.30 Context setting : Zero Waste and the Climate Negotiations

Mariel Vilella, Associate Director and Head of Climate Policy Programme - Zero Waste Europe / GAIA

• 10.45 Coffee break

• 11.00 Cities for Zero Waste: Successful Implementation Experiences from around the World

Luca Menesini, Mayor of Capannori (Italy)

Sir Thomas Isaac, City of Alappuzha representative (Kerala, India)

Edwin M. Lee, Mayor of San Francisco representative (US)

Fernando Haddad, Mayor of Sao Paulo (Brazil)

Moderator: Françoise Bonnet, Secretary General - ACR+

• 12.30 Recognition lunch for Cities committed to Zero Waste

New-York, Roubaix, Barcelona, Paris, Ljubljana (tbc)

Moderator : Joan Marc Simon, Director - Zero Waste Europe

• 14.00 The Role of Reuse and Recycling Workers in the Zero Waste Path

Do Huynh, Director - Carton Plein (Paris, France)

Representative of Indian Alliance of Waste Pickers (India)

Bobby Peek - Goldman Prize Winner, groundWork (South Africa)

Lor Holmes - CERO recycling cooperatives (Boston, USA)

Nohra Padilla - Goldman Prize 2014 Winner, Recycler's Association of Bogota (Colombia)

Moderator : Janet Redman, Director of the Climate Policy Program - Institute for Policy Studies (tbc)

• 15.15 Civil society: a key stakeholder for effective paradigm shifting

Flore Berlingen, Director - Zero Waste France (France)

Shibu Krishnankutty Nair - Zero Waste Himalayas (India)

Tian Quian - China Zero Waste Alliance (China)

Beth Grimberg - Aliança Lixo Zero Brazil (Brazil)

Paeng Lopez - EcoWaste Coalition Philippines (Philippines)

Moderator : Christie Keith, International Coordinator - GAIA

- **16.30 Coffee break**

- **17.00 Entrepreneurship & Economic Development in the Zero Waste City**

Peggy Zwolinski, Professor of engineering design and ecodesign - G-SCOP laboratory, University Grenoble Alpes (France)

Gérard Bellet, Director - Jean Bouteille (France)

Benjamin Tincq, Co-founder - POC 21/OuiShare

Toniic, Impact investors (tbc)

Moderator : Camille Duran, Executive Director - Green White Space

- **18.15 Wrap-up & closing session**

Delphine Lévi Alvarès, Advocacy officer - Zero Waste France

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AMPHITHÉÂTRE JEAN JAURÈS
45 RUE D'ULM
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