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Review of EU Waste Targets: Glass Packaging Industry is ready for a “Zero Waste” Policy and calls for Higher Recycling Targets and Separate Collection!

The transition to a resource-efficient economy is a unique opportunity for our societies to become waste free. The European Union should play a key role in pioneering such a concept. In order for this transition to be achieved successfully, the current linear industrial models (take-make-dispose) need to be progressively replaced by new circular ones (take-make-recycle). Glass as a material is a perfect fit for a circular model and a “zero waste” society. Once produced, glass becomes a permanent resource that can either be infinitely recycled in a closed loop, or used to produce reusable packaging solutions. Existing recycling and reuse systems that exploit waste as a precious resource for new production loops, such as demonstrated by glass packaging, need to be acknowledged and supported by legislation. In this framework, the current review of the EU Waste and Packaging and Packaging Waste directives is an important opportunity to push for a zero waste policy in Europe and develop the circular economy model.

Higher recycling targets for glass to close the gap

There is no limit to the number of times the same glass can be recycled in a closed loop without any loss of quality. Glass is 100% recyclable and today 71% of the glass bottles and jars used in the EU are collected for recycling. The glass packaging industry has the ambition therefore to close the gap to 100% because glass recycling is resource efficient, saves energy and reduces CO₂ emissions and waste. Ambitious new targets for glass recycling are essential to achieve this goal and such targets should be accompanied by structural measures to achieve them.

Reuse targets: Only for all materials

The packaging industry is able to provide sustainably sound solutions to customers, from recycling to reuse. Glass bottles for example can be reused 40 times on average. However, even though reuse works very well for specific business models, it cannot be a universal solution. If any legislation or targets are developed to support reuse, it is essential that they are applied to all consumer packaging.

Closed loop recycling is the best option for resource efficiency

The efficient use of raw materials, as well as the recycling of waste in a closed loop, is a key factor to build a sustainable, circular economy. Closed loop systems should therefore be acknowledged as best practice in recycling over downcycling, energy recovery or landfill. Materials that are permanently available to be recycled in a same production process over and over again without material losses or waste should be favoured in EU legislation.



Separate collection for recycling: bottle banks are best practice for glass

Separate collection schemes are absolutely essential in a circular model. The bottle bank for glass is a good example of a separate collection best practice scheme. The support of national and local authorities is needed to improve existing separate collection schemes and install new ones in countries where glass recycling has potential for improvement. What is critical is access to adequate separate collection points and better information to citizens on how to recycle more glass and better. This educational aspect has a big importance for the achievement of higher recycling targets. The current review of the EU waste legislation is an opportunity to identify existing barriers in Member States and help remove them to ensure an improved and increased recycling in the European Union.

Extended Producer Responsibility (Green dot) schemes should operate to implement the EU's Waste Hierarchy

The objective of EPR schemes is to manage post-consumer packaging on behalf of the legally obliged industry. They are mandated to effectively recycle waste and transform it into new resources for the producing industry. It is essential that appropriate collection schemes are designed by taking into consideration the national and local implications, as well as material characteristics. EPR schemes should be encouraged to treat waste based on the EU waste hierarchy and should involve the obliged industry (fillers, distributors, etc., and material producers) in the decision making process.

Clear definitions and better EU statistics are key to measure performance

The existing waste statistics do not always reflect the reality in the Member States as they are not always based on comparable data. In order to increase the recycling level in the EU it is essential to have reliable and comparable data as "what cannot be measured, cannot be improved". Therefore, the glass packaging industry calls for clear and common definitions and measurement methodologies of collection, recovery, actual recycling as well as the addition of closed loop recycling vs downcycling definitions. This is essential to monitor future progress in implementing the EU Waste hierarchy.

FEVE is the European Federation of glass packaging and glass tableware makers. Founded in 1977 and headquartered in Brussels, FEVE is an international not-for-profit association, which currently numbers over 60 company members and 22 corporate groups across the European Union, Switzerland and Turkey. FEVE is actively participating in the EU Waste Legislation review to support the points mentioned in this paper.

For further information about FEVE's position on the EU waste legislation, please consult the FEVE website: www.feve.org