

Swiss intervention on waste management

May 5, 2010,

Development of waste disposal and recycling in Switzerland

- The tradition of developing and using environmental technologies especially for waste management has existed for a long time in Switzerland. As early as the 1960s the country became a pioneer in this domain by rigorously installing treatment and incineration plants with stringent emission standards.

National challenges and achievements

- Today it can be said that Switzerland has succeeded in moving from basic waste removal to an environmentally friendly process of waste disposal and recycling. Now, incineration plants are efficient power plants which produce clean heat and electricity.
- Hazardous waste accounts for about 6% of all waste in Switzerland. The total volume could be kept about constant since 2000.
- The total amount of municipal solid waste has been increasing constantly in Switzerland. In order to deal with this challenge, effective recycling policies and facilities were put in place. Today, 50% of the waste is collected separately and recycled. This share has more than doubled over the past 20 years.
- Reducing waste and recycling have become main objectives and guiding principles of the Swiss waste policy. Today, Swiss recycling rates are among the highest in the world. The remaining wastes are incinerated in clean processes which generate electricity and heat. Switzerland financially supports the production of renewable energy connected with waste treatment, which is an essential area of innovative technologies. Another area of growth is biogenic wastes used for the production of electricity, heat and fertilizer.
- Another major policy element besides high waste management standards and a highly effective infrastructure are financial systems and economic instruments that were applied. In particular, a financing system was introduced that makes the waste producers responsible for the costs of disposal. This way, some of the external costs could be integrated. The largest share of the cost of waste management can be charged to the polluters according to the polluter-pays-principle.
- In the area of electrical and electronic appliances, for example, consumers are charged a small disposal charge which is included in the purchase price. In return, all retailers, manufactures and importers are required to take back at no charge end-of-life appliances. The collection and disposal of electronic waste and its financing is thus largely managed by the private-sector itself through associations which have been established for this.
- By 2011 Switzerland will have registered all polluted sites (areas where wastes have been deposited or have infiltrated the underground). Polluted sites causing harmful environmental effects or nuisances are known as “contaminated sites”. Until 2015 they have to be investigated and ten year later they will be remediated.

- Through these waste management policies and measures, the level of environmental pressure caused by waste management was significantly reduced in Switzerland over the years despite continuous growth in the total volume of solid waste.

Basel Convention – activities on the international level

- Switzerland has initiated crucial initiatives within the Basel Convention, such as the Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative, the Partnership on Action on Computing Equipment - for the treatment of disused computers and together with Indonesia the country-led initiative with the goal to propose a way forward to address the problem of waste ending up in countries that do not have the capacity to manage them in an environmentally sound management.
- Switzerland is active in the transfer of technologies and the implementation of environmentally friendly disposal in Asia, Latin America and Africa. A pilot project in South Africa together with the world market leader Hewlett-Packard for the treatment of electronic waste is an example of this. In 2008, a treatment plant for disused computers and printers was built in Cape Town. Similar projects have also been launched in China and India.
- For an effective and efficient chemicals and waste policy Switzerland has strongly promoted the strengthening of synergies, cooperation and coordination within the international chemicals and waste cluster.

Conclusion:

Due to the huge flow of goods worldwide, it will not be sufficient to act at the end of the production supply chain only in order to effectively control the environmental impacts. To achieve sustainable development, it will be even more necessary to improve social and environmental criteria all along the life cycle of goods and services.