

IRISH WASTE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR MORE GOVERNMENT ACTION ON RECYCLING TARGETS

Ireland is not on track to meet future EU Recycling Targets

The Irish Waste Management Association (IWMA), representing Irish waste management companies, is calling on the Government to take urgent action to ensure that Ireland meets its recycling targets under the EU Waste Framework Directive.

Already the 2025 recycling target of 55% is out of reach and to meet the 2030 recycling target of 60%, Ireland will have to more than double the amount of material recycled in 2019. Under the present system these recycling targets are unrealistic for Ireland, and many other EU Member States.

In the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, published last year by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), the Irish Government passed the responsibility for meeting recycling targets onto waste collectors by committing to attach the targets to waste collection permits. The IWMA does not accept that as a solution.

According to Conor Walsh, Secretary of the IWMA, *“Waste collectors are not the producers that put the material on the market, they are not the consumers that place the materials in segregated bins, and they do not make the laws that govern those actions. The waste industry facilitates the collection, sorting, and recycling of waste and has not been found wanting in that regard. However, the sector cannot be held responsible for the actions of producers, consumers, and the Government.”*

Over the past 3 years the IWMA has proposed various solutions to government to tackle the recycling target issue. These include the:

- Introduction of an incentivised system to provide financial rewards for householders that increase their own recycling rates.
- Introduction of a voluntary Recycling Performance scheme for businesses that will be independently audited, with those that perform well being rewarded financially by a discount on commercial rates or another financial reward provided by the State or by the Producers (e.g., Environment Fund, Carbon Tax, Extended Producer Responsibility, etc.).
- New measures for apartment complexes whereby the occupants are individually incentivised to reduce and recycle waste using specialised bins and smartcards.

The IWMA believes that the key to enhanced recycling performance is to incentivise consumers, producers, and other businesses to reduce their waste output. The financial implications of such incentives are small compared with the massive fines that Ireland can expect from the EU after 2025 if we fail to reform our recycling targets.

The IWMA has also called on the Irish Government to open discussions with the EU and other Member States on the metrics used to rank waste management performance across the EU.

The municipal solid waste (MSW) recycling rate is too blunt an instrument to accurately assess waste management performance as not only does it not compare like with like, but it also works against waste prevention measures. The IWMA recommends that the EU should instead measure:

- Household waste generated per capita.
- Household waste recycling rate.
- Household residual waste per capita (the remainder after recycling).

And for each industry sector:

- Waste generated per unit of economic output (or per employee in that sector).
- Recycling Rate in that NACE Sector.
- Residual waste per unit of economic output (or per employee in that sector).

The IWMA is confident that Ireland will be highly ranked if these metrics are used, particularly in respect of household waste.

According to Conor Walsh, Secretary of the IWMA, "As we have a system of incentivised charging, householders are encouraged to prevent and recycle waste with the result that Ireland has one of the lowest levels of black bin household waste per capita in Europe. Some other countries have higher recycling rates, but this is mostly due to the collection of garden waste, which is relatively low in Ireland. Ireland can collect garden waste to chase the recycling target, but is that the right approach environmentally? The Irish Government must engage the EU on this matter."

Conor Walsh will be presenting this message at the Irish Waste Management Conference in Croke Park today, Thursday 10th March 2022.

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