Dutch Waste Management Association

Annual Review 2020

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About this publication

The Annual Review 2020 looks back on some of the important developments during the year.

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We need an integrated vision on circularity, climate and economy

2020 will go down as the 'Covid year'. The pandemic placed great demands on our members. Their work had to continue, and they had to cope with a major shift in waste arisings caused by the closure of shops and hospitality establishments and a rapid rise in homeworking. And they succeeded – with hard work and without too much disruption. Our sector undoubtedly played its part in keeping society functioning and I am really proud of all the men and women who made it happen.

During the Covid pandemic we have continued to work flat out on the transition to a circular economy. Like last year, much of our time was taken up with the import tax, which we firmly believe will not help this transition at all. Achieving more efficient reuse and recycling will depend on retaining a certain amount of incineration capacity for residual waste streams. Other countries can also make use of Dutch incineration capacity to avoid landfilling their waste, which in turn avoids greenhouse gas emissions. That's why we made an alternative plan to achieve the intended CO_2 emission reductions and counted on the government to rescind the import tax from 2022. Unfortunately, this spring the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management imposed an additional requirement to considerably reduce incineration capacity over the short term, without any financial or environmental justification. The environment will not benefit from this paper victory at all. We are therefore pleased that there has been political pressure to prepare a realistic plan for capacity management.

If we really do want a circular economy in 2050, the structure of the economy will have to be fundamentally altered – and not only in the Netherlands. To keep materials in the value chain we will have to change the way we design, manufacture and consume products to limit the use of raw materials and extend the useful life of products, with much more repair, reuse and recycling. We need business models in which consumers pay for use rather than ownership. Only that can substantially reduce the waste mountain.

We hope that the next government will develop a more integrated vision on circularity, climate and the economy. The sector is preparing for a future with less waste and is more than willing to share ideas with value chain partners on a new way of working. Until then the waste companies will ensure that whatever society no longer needs will be safely and carefully disposed of, with the maximum recovery of raw materials and energy.

Boris van der Ham
President of the Dutch Waste Management Association

Quality demands an **effort** from all **value chain partners**

In the interests of closed-loop recycling, the DWMA has persistently called for improvements to the quality of separately collected waste streams. If we want to make progress, the focus must be on quality at every link in the chain. For household waste streams, clear communication with consumers is essential, and an important step in this direction was taken with the launch of the uniform Yes/No list for food and garden waste.

Ten action points

If collected waste streams are to be recycled and reused in the manufacture of high-grade products, they must be of high quality. Low quality material hampers the transition to a circular economy. Almost all waste streams have seen a loss in quality, but those most affected by this problem are separately collected plastic, food and garden waste (FGW) and waste paper. In 2020 the DWMA published a fact sheet with 10 action points for improving quality for the value chain partners to work with. Each stage in the chain has its own areas of concern that need to be addressed, depending on the type of waste. All parties need to maintain stricter quality standards, reward better quality, do more research and monitor the results, and – of course – work with their partners in the chain.

Uniform Yes/No list for FGW

Food and garden waste is still the biggest fraction in residual household waste, at more than 30%. To increase the volume and quality of separately collected FGW, the partners in the chain, including the DWMA, drew up a single Yes/No list for FGW. Clear, unambiguous communication is needed to ensure that everyone puts this waste in the right bin. The Yes/No list for FGW was launched in spring 2020. Besides the new list, a package of other communication materials is available free of charge for all parties to use. The Yes/No list became part of national policy in 2021 and has been included in the National Waste Management Plan.

Petition to Parliament on clean FGW

The agricultural sector demands that compost used as a soil conditioner must be of the highest quality – and clean, high quality

compost can only be made from clean FGW. In 2000 about 1% of FGW consisted of materials that do not belong in it, and this has now risen to 5%. If this trend continues it will put FGW recycling at risk, which will in turn endanger the transition to a circular economy. The DWMA, on behalf of seven other organisations active in waste management, recycling and the environment, petitioned the House of Representatives to take measures to combat the increasing contamination of food and garden waste. The organisations call for (1) the introduction of a quality standard limiting contaminants in FGW to a maximum of 2%, (2) the removal of logos on packaging indicating that biodegradable plastics are permitted in FGW, and (3) a recycling target for municipalities that shifts the focus onto clean waste streams instead of reducing the total amount of residual waste. And they have been heard. Members of the House of Representatives have asked questions about the rising contamination levels in FGW and have enquired after the possibilities for doing something about it. The government recognises that the quality of FGW must improve and has pledged to look into banning logos on packaging that incorrectly state that it can be disposed of in the FGW bin.

See also:

- Paper recycling industry raises the quality bar
- For recycling, mattresses must be clean and dry
- Improving quality of food and garden waste requires value chain collaboration

Recycling and **reuse** in the **battle against climate change**

The government's preferred measure to combat climate change is taxation. In mid-2019 the waste sector was caught unawares by the introduction of an import tax on combustible residual waste. In 2020 a carbon tax was imposed as well. Waste and recycling companies are keen to contribute towards the climate targets, but more effective methods are available to reduce CO_2 emissions. Taxation puts a brake on innovation and the transition to sustainability.

Sector plan for carbon reduction

In 2020, talks with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management were reconvened to discuss an alternative plan for reducing CO_2 emissions by 0.2 Mt. The government introduced the import tax to bring about this emissions reduction in the waste and recycling chain and meet the requirements of the Urgenda ruling (the decision on the case brought against the government forcing it to take further measures against climate change). In a study by PwC the DWMA has shown that the carbon tax will not deliver this reduction, but rather will create investment uncertainties and undermine innovation and sustainability. The sector has come up with an alternative plan that will achieve the intended reduction by taking incineration capacity off the market and upgrading the treatment of material streams. The DWMA expected the government to honour the agreement it made with the House of Representatives and the Senate at the end of 2019, which states that if the sector comes up with an alternative plan for the 0.2 Mt reduction in CO_2 emissions, the government will scrap the import tax. Unfortunately, in spring 2021 the DWMA was forced to conclude that the government has not kept its word and has let slip an opportunity to achieve a real carbon reduction.

Carbon tax will not green the sector

From 2021 the sector will have to pay a carbon tax, a measure included in the National Climate Agreement. Companies which emit more CO_2 than the government considers acceptable will have to pay a carbon tax. However, this charge will not make the waste sector more sustainable. Waste-to-energy (WtE) plants cannot make their processes more efficient in order to reduce their CO_2 emissions, because they have little or no control over the amount and composition of residual waste they receive for treatment. The tax leaves WtE plants with just one measure to reduce CO_2 emissions, carbon capture and storage, and they believe this is not a sustainable solution. The sector argues that it is better to reuse the CO_2, for example in greenhouse horticulture. However, a disadvantage of this is that the avoided emissions would not then be credited to waste incineration, but to greenhouse horticulture. The same goes for the use of electricity and heat provided by the waste sector. These indirect measures do not lead to lower emissions at the

WtE plants themselves, but they do result in 'avoided emissions' because they replace energy generation by fossil fuels.

Financial leeway

The carbon tax will push up costs and lead to an uneven European playing field. And it will consume financial resources that the sector could otherwise use to invest in the circular economy and sustainability. If incineration at Dutch WtE plants becomes more expensive, discarders of waste will look for other options and combustible waste will be exported to countries where it can be treated more cheaply. This amounts to unfair competition. Any carbon tax should be applied across the whole of Europe. The waste sector embraces the government's climate ambitions, but the carbon tax will be counterproductive for materials management. Efforts should be made further up the chain to stimulate recycling and reuse, for example by imposing an obligation to use more recycled material in the manufacture of products. Using more recycled material reduces the need for primary raw materials and fossil fuels, and that in turn delivers reductions in carbon emissions.

Higher recycled content for the **transition** to a **circular economy**

Support is growing for a European standard on the use of recycled plastics in new products. The DWMA has been pushing for this for some time, and there should be a similar standard for recycled content for other recycled raw materials as well. This would significantly boost the shift towards a circular economy.

Sales drive

The DWMA's position is that the EU should support the waste sector with measures to stimulate the sale and use of secondary raw materials. This is desperately needed as plastic recycling is going through a difficult time. Plastic made from fossil resources is cheaper than recycled plastic. Moreover, in 2020 the business case for plastic recycling was further undermined by the Covid pandemic. The DWMA wholeheartedly supported the Dutch government's appeal to the European Commission to propose a mandatory recycled content in plastic products, as a standard for a minimum recycled content can only be introduced at the European level. Making the use of secondary raw materials in new products mandatory will increase demand and improve the business case for recycled materials.

Action plan for a circular economy

The DWMA is delighted that the European Commission has included a mandatory rule on a minimum recycled content for products in its 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan. Another positive development is the rec-

ognition of the importance of eco-design, which the DWMA believes is crucial for establishing a circular economy. Gearing design and production to prevention, reuse and recycling will make products properly circular. Large-scale landfilling is still standard practice in many European countries and the DWMA sees the Commission's failure to take steps to reduce it as a missed opportunity. Encouraging a tax on incineration and landfill, however, is a good idea, because it will help to create a level playing field across the European Union. The sector wants to substantially increase investment in the circular economy, but this depends on guaranteed equal treatment and an open European market for waste. A single European market for waste with optimal use of high quality recycling and waste treatment will help to drive the transition towards a circular economy. National borders, administrative barriers and differences in interpretation of policy must be avoided. The DWMA would like to see the European authorities quickly turning their ambitions into legislation.

Promote **more and better recycling** for **more circularity**

Crucial in the transition to a circular economy and for climate protection is the recycling of waste resulting from production and consumption. The DWMA is working to promote more and better recycling and in 2020 highlighted citizens' initiatives in this direction.

Recycling Hero 2020

The theme of Global Recycling Day 2020 was Recycling Heroes. Global Recycling Day is held each year on 18 March and is organised by the Global Recycling Foundation, the organisation which supports the promotion of recycling across the world. The DWMA is affiliated to the Foundation and is doing all it can to highlight the importance of recycling. In 2020 we launched a competition to put the spotlight on individual Dutch heroes and citizens' initiatives working to promote recycling. Five people were nominated. In a short film made by the DWMA they talk about their efforts towards a more sustainable world. On 18 March 2020 the DWMA announced that Rien Voets, a litter picker from Berlicum (a small town in the south of the Netherlands), had been chosen as Recycling Hero 2020. Rien represents the many volunteers who do what they can to help keep the living environment clean and tidy. Since his retirement, this dedicated pensioner sets off every day on his bike and trailer to clear up litter. Unfortunately, because of the Covid restrictions, the presentation of the award by Stientje van Veldhoven, state secretary for infrastructure and water management, could not go ahead on 18 March as planned. Instead, the presentation took place on 25 November during the online National Recycling Congress in The Hague.

Separating food waste in high-rise buildings

The results of the pilot studies on the collection of food waste in high-rise buildings were pub-

See also:

- Improved waste separation in high-rise buildings

lished in 2020. The pilot studies are part of the From Waste to Raw Material (VANG) household waste programme in which the DWMA participates. After five years of extensive scientific research, the conclusion is clear: source separation of food waste in high-rise buildings is feasible. The outcome of this research is a menu which shows which measures work. Ten options were tested, spread across six pilot studies. The method that delivers the best results is distributing kitchen utensils to the residents, such as small bins with biodegradable bags. Many parties involved in the waste management chain worked together in the high-rise project, including municipalities, residents, national government, research institutes and waste companies. Composters are keen to obtain food waste from high-rise buildings, as organic kitchen waste is particularly suitable for anaerobic digestion followed by composting. The pilots have shown that the raw material is clean enough, which is a key criterion for the sector because only then can it be used for the production of clean compost.

Clean food waste for **more clean compost**

Energy from **waste important** for the **energy transition**

The waste sector makes a significant contribution towards a sustainable energy economy. Energy from waste accounts for about 10% of the sustainable energy generated in the Netherlands. But much more is possible if optimum use is made of heat and steam.

Growth

The amount of sustainable energy generated in the Netherlands is rising steadily. In 2020, 11% of total energy consumption came from renewable sources. The supply of solar and wind energy has grown the strongest, which is why the proportion of sustainable energy coming from waste-to-energy plants has declined in relative terms. In 2020 it was almost 8%. In absolute terms, though, the amount of electricity and heat from waste has risen, and can be further increased by making greater use of the potential in existing plant capacity. In that sense, the sector will remain an important producer and supplier of renewable energy in future. The Dutch target of 14% sustainable energy in 2020 has not been reached and so a major impetus will be needed to meet the target of 16% in 2023. The government wants energy supply to be almost entirely sustainable by 2050.

Regional agreements

In 2019 a start was made with the preparation of Regional Energy Strategies (RESs). The country has been divided into 30 regions, each of which was tasked with finding the best options for the generation of sustainable energy. The

resulting RESs contain regional agreements on sustainable energy production. They have a time horizon of 2030, with a forward view to 2050. The draft RESs were submitted in October 2020.
The plans for each region are different, but the heat the waste sector produces and can deliver in future is appreciated in many of the RESs. Industry needs heat to make their processes more sustainable and district heating is in demand for residential areas. The sector has a part to play in the energy transition and this must be properly reflected in the RESs.

Potential

The heat available from waste-to-energy plants, biomass power plants and anaerobic digesters can grow to 32 petajoules by 2023, of which 20 petajoules are renewable. This is equivalent to the average natural gas consumption of about 800,000 households. This heat and steam can be used, for example, to heat homes, greenhouses and businesses, and as process steam for industry. Heat and steam from incinerators are among the most cost-effective technologies, and for this reason alone the sector deserves a place in the Dutch energy transition.

Safe and **healthy working** during the **Covid pandemic**

In 2020 the Covid pandemic added a new dimension to safe and healthy working. The government put the waste industry on its list of vital sectors; its work had to go on. But of course it remains essential not to lose sight of the need to provide a safe and healthy working environment for our workers and to comply with the Covid regulations. At the initiative of the DWMA the waste industry and unions drew up their own protocol – and it proved effective. The waste industry has continued working and the number of infections has been kept to manageable proportions.

Visible vitality

The Covid pandemic has shown just how essential the waste sector is. Immediately after the virus took hold in the Netherlands the sector stepped forward and introduced appropriate measures, both to protect workers against infection and to guarantee that waste collection and treatment would continue. The DWMA took pride in the men and women who continued to work at full strength, and accepted the offer of free advertising time made to all trade and industry organisations by STER (the Dutch sales operator for advertising on public TV and radio). It used this opportunity to put waste workers in the spotlight and expressed its appreciation for their efforts, stressing how relevant the work of the waste sector is in keeping society functioning smoothly. The industry plays a part in almost everything we do. We all rely on it.

Waste Sector Protocol

Safe working is the guiding principle for the sector: the health and safety of workers, clients, customers and suppliers must always be guaranteed. The Waste Sector Protocol provides clear instructions on how social distancing and hygiene measures can be observed in the workplace. It was drawn up by industry, employers and workers organisations BRBS Recycling (the Dutch association for the recycling of construction and demolition wastes), the Association of Dutch Greenwaste Composting Plants (BVOR), the Association for Refuse and Cleansing Management (NVRD), DWMA, the CNV and FNV union federations, plant operators' union HZC and employers' association WENB, and is based on the guidelines, advice and measures issued by the national government and RIVM (Netherlands Institute for Public Health and

the Environment). The protocol provides organisations with the information they need to draw up separate protocols based on their own working practices and procedures and their own risk inventory and evaluation. This approach suits the sector best, because no one organisation is the same as another and each has its own specific activities. The parties which have drawn up the sector protocol are examining how the measures it contains can be tied into the Health and Safety Catalogue for the Waste Sector to ensure the protocol remains up to date and the effectiveness of the measures is evaluated.

Safety Week 2020: Keep Your Distance

The Covid pandemic made events and large gatherings impossible. Nevertheless, Safety Week 2020, organised by the Health and Safety Catalogue for the Waste Sector Foundation, did go ahead. Safe and healthy working was an even more important topic than it usually is in the waste sector. During the week companies and industry organisations worked together on

Pride in the **men** and **women** who **carried on working** at **full strength**

the theme Keep Your Distance. Keeping your distance is the order of the day in the socially distanced society, but waste workers are already used to this in many situations during their working day. Examples are hazardous waste, moving parts of machinery, working with power shovels and around refuse vehicles in traffic. The DWMA and its members took part in the Safety Week. The DWMA showed how cooperation throughout the value chain ensures that companies can all get through the crisis unscathed.

Sector destroys oak processionary moth caterpillars

In 2020 the DWMA, the government, hauliers and landscape contractors drew up a protocol for the destruction of oak processionary moth caterpillars. The protocol contains agreements on the safe containment, removal and destruction of the caterpillars as soon as they present a problem. The protocol allows the sector to respond appropriately whenever necessary. The waste companies guarantee the availability of sufficient treatment capacity and that nests, caterpillars and hairs will be destroyed quickly and safely.

Impact of Covid pandemic on waste arisings

The Covid outbreak led to a shift in waste streams. The lockdown brought the flow of commercial waste from the hospitality sector, businesses, shops and schools to a virtual standstill. The pandemic has also put circularity under pressure. PMD and textile recycling stalled, mainly because the car industry – which uses part of these raw materials in the manufacture of insulation materials – ground to a halt in the spring. Waste piled up, increasing the risk of fires breaking out. Together with the national government, the DWMA came up with a solution by applying a provision in the National Waste Management Plan that permits deviation from minimum standards during an emergency. Under the provision, this waste could temporarily be treated in waste-to-energy plants. To guarantee continuity of the collection, sorting and recycling of packaging waste in the Netherlands, a PMD, Glass and Paper Crisis Team was set up, of which the DWMA is a member.

In contrast, during the lockdown the volumes of household waste, green waste and waste arriving at the municipal recycling centres increased as people took to DIY and clearing out their homes. The Covid outbreak even led to record volumes of separately collected food and garden waste. One other waste stream that grew rapidly was clinical waste. Nevertheless, cooperation between partners in the chain prevented any hold-ups in the treatment of this waste, avoiding any potentially unsafe situations. When a shortage of bins for the collection, transport and treatment of clinical Covid contaminated waste was imminent, an agreement was reached with the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate. 'Dry' Covid waste, which includes masks, gloves and protective clothing from medical staff, may temporarily be stored in plastic bags, while 'wet' clinical waste from patients must still be put in the usual bins.