



Dutch Waste Management Association
Partner in the circular economy



Annual Review 2021

Proper **waste separation** **important** at work too



At home it is already second nature, separating our waste and putting it into different bins. And it is obvious why we do it: the wastes are used to make new raw materials. But once we leave home and when we are at work, we suddenly drop the habit. When you think about it, it does seem rather odd.

A couple of good examples: For some years now Dutch Railways have had dual waste bins on their platforms, one for clean, dry paper and one for all other waste. And while some businesses ask their employees to separate different types of waste, most of the waste produced in offices, shops and other businesses is all disposed of as residual waste. Surely we can do better than that.

I want to be able to separate my waste at the sports club, at the petrol station and in shops, and the people who work there should want to do that too. Have you ever asked your boss why that is not yet possible? All this waste amounts to about 5 million tonnes each year. About half is recycled. Around 2 million tonnes – often waste similar to household waste – is collected and processed as residual waste. The Dutch Waste Management Association supports the government's ambition to reduce this fraction of residual waste to 1 million tonnes.

Our members are ready to collect more separated waste from businesses and turn it into valuable raw materials that can be used in the manufacture of new products. They have the appropriate solution in house for each waste stream.

We are going to encourage business in the hospitality and retail industries and in the cultural sector to separate more of their waste. We will make them aware of the possibilities that exist and the opportunities they present to speed up the transition to the circular economy. Our members can also help businesses to separate as much of their waste as possible, correctly and easily.

To make the separate collection and recycling of this waste a success, we are looking to work with other parties in the chain, such as the government, the Dutch SME organisation MKB Nederland, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW) and other trade associations. Will you join with us as well?

Boris van der Ham
President of the Dutch Waste Management Association

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Vital sector keeps society functioning during Covid pandemic

As in 2020, the Covid pandemic had a major impact in 2021. The waste sector again had to make every effort to get its work done. As a 'vital sector', the waste industry could not be allowed to grind to a halt. The large number of Covid patients and the many Covid-19 tests kept the volumes of medical waste at a high level. The regulation drawn up jointly by the sector and government on the processing of medical waste had to be repeatedly extended. Under the regulation, 'dry' Covid waste, including face masks, gloves and protective clothing from medical staff, may temporarily be packed, transported and processed in plastic bags. 'Wet' medical waste from patients still had to be packed in drums, which in normal times is required for all medical waste. Due to a shortfall in processing capacity for medical waste, dry waste was temporarily sent for processing in waste-to-energy plants.

Employees in the spotlight during the Week of Waste Heroes

The Covid pandemic has shown just how essential the waste sector is. The industry is indispensable in keeping society functioning. But it is the men and women who do the practical work who are key. To put all employees in the sector in the spotlight and increase the visibility of the important work they do, the Association for Refuse and Cleansing Management and the DWMA launched the Week of Waste Heroes. The industry organisations feel that the public should be more aware of the important work the waste companies, organisations and their employees do every day to make the country cleaner and more sustainable. They also want to show what happens to the waste once it has been collected or handed in at the recycling centre.

During the Week of Waste Heroes in the first week of March, employees in the sector were thanked for their efforts in many different ways. Residents wrote cards, employers provided cakes and breakfast, children hung up posters and drawings, and each day of the week the DWMA published a vlog or film in which the waste heroes themselves talked about why they are proud of their work. The week helped to position the waste industry as an attractive employer, which is particularly important now that there is a general shortage of labour.

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CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Prevent waste and increase high-quality recycling

A circular economy revolves around preventing waste and preserving raw materials. We could preserve more raw materials if we also separated commercial waste for collection and recycling. A key condition for producing high-quality recycled materials is ensuring the input material is of high quality. Clean base material is essential for making pure new raw materials.

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Separating waste at work

Separating waste at home has become second nature, but it is not part of the routine when we are at work, on the go or at the gym. Both the government and the DWMA feel this has to change. More of the waste arising outside the home that is comparable with household waste should be separately collected and recycled in new materials and products. In 2021 the DWMA and its members made preparations to launch a campaign in 2022 to raise awareness among businesses in the office, retail and services sectors of the opportunities this presents for the transition to a circular economy. The campaign should motivate them to step up efforts to separate more waste streams.

Less disposable plastic

At the end of 2021 the DWMA responded to the draft regulation on single-use plastics. The aim is to cut down the use of these plastics, which in turn should reduce the amount of plastic litter and help to make the country cleaner. The DWMA supports the aim of the regulation, but has asked the government to reconsider its choice of alternative materials, which should have a real environmental benefit and be a step towards the circular economy. The DWMA feels there should be more regulatory oversight and controls on unjustified claims of reusability and recyclability. In addi-

Clean base material is essential for making pure new raw materials

tion, the definition of high-quality recycling should put more emphasis on materials recycling and preserving the value of raw materials so that they can be reused in products. In turn, this will increase the possibilities for using recycled materials. It is also important that manufacturers of disposable products are made financially responsible for the total clean-up and disposal costs.

Compostable coffee pads and teabags in prospect

In April 2021 the Dutch government, the Dutch tea and coffee industry association Koffie & Thee Nederland and the DWMA signed a Green Deal in which they pledge to make coffee pads and teabags that can be disposed of in the food and garden waste bin. This is currently not the case because they contain non-compostable materials. Dutch coffee and tea companies are working to ensure at least 75% of the coffee pads and teabags on the Dutch market are compostable. The aim is that eventually all companies operating in the Netherlands will have switched to compostable coffee

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pads and teabags. When this has been achieved a valuable raw material will have been rescued from residual waste, there will be less plastic contamination of food and garden waste, and compost will be all the better for the addition of tea leaves and coffee grounds. This step can potentially deliver about 88 million kilograms of extra food and garden waste per year.

Quality is paramount

To make the most of food and garden waste it must be separated in the right way. Only properly separated and uncontaminated food and garden waste can be turned into clean, high-quality compost, which can then be used to create healthy, fertile soils in which crops grow well. All of us can therefore make an important contribution towards more sustainable cultivation of our food. In 2021 the DWMA and its members reinforced this message with the launch of the

film *Schoon gift voor schone compost* ('Clean food and garden waste for clean compost').

The government endorses the goal of good quality food and garden waste. Following the 2020 petition in which the DWMA called upon the government to take action to halt the growing contamination of food and garden waste, the minister for the environment said that clean food and garden waste is a crucial condition for its recycling into high-quality compost. The ministry also made it clear that packaging does not belong in food and garden waste, even when it is labelled as biodegradable or compostable. The government intends to rectify this misleading information on packaging and in 2021 made a start by preparing a prohibition on the use of so-called 'biodegradable' plastics, which cause problems in composting and recycling. The industry is pleased by the government's commitment. It takes a concerted effort to raise the quality of food and garden waste.

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CLIMATE

Protecting the climate through reduction elsewhere in the chain

The waste and recycling sector supports the government's climate ambitions and makes an important contribution to reducing carbon emissions through prevention, recycling and energy production. The higher up the waste hierarchy we can get through our joint efforts, the greater the waste sector's carbon reductions will be.

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Emission reduction in the chain

The waste sector treats the wastes that arise from production and consumption processes. Waste companies have no influence over the input material and so they can do little to directly reduce the carbon emissions from their processes. In 2021 the DWMA repeatedly raised this restriction on possible emission reduction options with the government. The recycled raw materials and energy from waste delivered by the sector reduce the use of primary raw materials and fuels and their associated carbon emissions. For these emissions reductions elsewhere in the chain the sector deserves credit. The waste sector makes further emissions reductions in the chain by capturing and reusing CO₂. To improve the opportunities for reusing CO₂, in 2021 a carbon capture and utilisation (CCU) alliance was established in which the DWMA and some of its partners participate. This CCU Alliance asked the new government to develop a vision and policy framework for carbon capture and utilisation.

Additional requirement for repealing the import tax

In spring 2021 it became clear that the sector's plan for a 0.2 Mt CO₂ emission reduction was not sufficient reason for the government to scrap the import tax. The plan is to intro-

CO₂ capture and reuse boosts emissions reductions in the chain

duce higher grade processing of certain waste streams and withdraw specific processing capacity from the market. The government ignored this concrete and validated plan and presented an additional requirement that the waste sector shut down part of the Dutch incineration capacity at short notice. The public and private owners of this Dutch capacity were in fact being asked to relinquish part or full ownership of their facilities. The sector could not simply agree to this. Any reduction in capacity can only be voluntary and must be backed by financial support. Moreover, Dutch capacity remains an essential element in meeting European climate ambitions. The government's decision kicks the circular economy and climate objectives further down the road. The DWMA found the House of Representatives on its side. The House was prepared to reconsider the import tax if the government, in consultation with the waste sector, can come up with a realistic scenario for the reduction in capacity. The government should in any case consider the effects on

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the whole waste chain, on employment, on the sustainable energy and heat supplied by the waste-to-energy plants, and on carbon reductions at the European level. The DWMA and the ministry resumed consultations.

Energy strategy for industrial sectors

In 2021 nine industrial sectors, including the waste sector represented by the DWMA and its members, prepared their cluster energy strategy (CES). In this strategy the companies in 'Cluster 6' state how they intend to support the energy transition and reduce carbon emissions. It is clear that a substantial and timely expansion of infrastructure is essential for an affordable energy transition. The CES will be published in 2022 and submitted to the minister for climate and energy policy.

Accurate sewer maintenance for liveability

Accurate sewer maintenance and integrated water management are crucial for maintaining liveability and minimising climate change impacts. The sewer cleaning and inspection companies affiliated with the DWMA made this clear in a 2021 position paper. Climate change and the associated flooding, population growth and expansion of the built-up area are putting increasing pressure on the sewerage system. Good sewer maintenance is vital to ensure sufficient water storage capacity to prevent flooding and infestations of rats and mice on the streets and to support a safe and healthy living environment. The sewerage industry calls upon its clients and contractors to join with them in taking responsibility for the good maintenance of our sewerage system.

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EUROPEAN UNION

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The EU wants to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent in the world and to that end it is revising and updating EU legislation. The waste industry is both willing and able to play an important part in this process. An important issue that still requires attention is reducing the landfilling of recyclable and combustible waste in the member states. The use of recycled materials should be strongly encouraged.

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Climate-neutral Europe

In summer 2021 the European Commission published its Fit for 55 package. Its aim is to revise and update existing legislation in order to meet the growing challenges presented by climate change. By bringing together policies for climate, energy, land use, transport and taxes, the package will enable the EU to reduce its net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. Aligning and interconnecting the various pieces of sectoral legislation will not be easy, but the DWMA supports the ambition. The waste sector is making every effort to contribute towards meeting the new targets.

Research on emissions reductions by the sector

In 2021 European industry associations initiated research into possible ways in which the waste sector can reduce its carbon emissions. The results will provide an input to the Fit for 55 package. The DWMA supports the research. It is clear that prevention and recycling can make a big contribution to reducing emissions and protecting the climate. In many European countries recyclable and combustible waste still ends up in landfills. If more commercial and industrial waste were to be recovered for recycling it would deliver a major reduction in emissions. The DWMA also sees

Preserving raw materials through mandatory use of recycled materials

opportunities in the Netherlands for a further shift from recovery to recycling.

Stimulus for recycled raw materials

A positive development is that a growing number of European players are working to strengthen the position of recycled raw materials with respect to primary raw materials. They call upon the European institutions to legislate for the compulsory use of recycled materials in the manufacture of new products, something the DWMA has long been campaigning for. If more circular materials find their way onto the market, there will be more closed loop recycling and more raw materials will be preserved. This would give a significant boost to the circular economy.

New export rules

In November 2021 the European Commission published a new proposal on exporting waste and the DWMA has been involved in various consultation rounds on the preparation of the new Waste Shipment Regulation (WSR). It is good

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news for the environment and public health that wastes will not be shipped to countries that do not have the necessary facilities to treat them safely and in an environmentally sound way. However, the sector disapproves of the fact that the new WSR erects barriers within the EU to the transport of waste that is destined for energy recovery. There is a risk that this will result in more combustible waste being landfilled in the EU.

EU Taxonomy Regulation

In 2021 the European Commission drew up a document on sustainable activities that contribute to the greening of society. These are activities that have been shown to contribute to the protection of the climate, the environment and public health. The Taxonomy Regulation provides the

financial sector with a framework to facilitate sustainable investment. The list of activities includes waste prevention, reuse and recycling. Thermal processing is excluded, which may lead to higher interest burdens and reduced access to capital. Waste-to-energy plants provide an environmentally sound form of treatment for non-recyclable combustible residual waste and they produce sustainable energy. In the DWMA's opinion they therefore have an important complementary role to play in the circular economy. The DWMA is campaigning with several European organisations to have waste incineration with energy recovery included in the Taxonomy Regulation on the basis of its contribution towards reducing carbon emissions and the safety net it provides for recycling by processing unusable materials.

See also:

- [European waste sector has an impressive climate potential](#)
- [Waste-to-energy missing in EU Taxonomy](#)



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RECYCLING & RESIDUAL MATERIALS

Closing loops and recycling into high-quality raw materials

The Netherlands recycles about 80% of the more than 60 million kilograms of waste arising each year. Many initiatives are being taken to return more raw materials to the value chain, the main aim being to recycle wastes into high-quality raw materials. Waste that cannot be recycled or that we do not want to return to society is handled with due care and sent for environmentally sound treatment in waste-to-energy plants or stored in landfills.

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International Recycling Hero 2021

The DWMA nominated Rien Voets for the Recycling Heroes 2021 competition run by the Global Recycling Foundation. Rien is a litter clearer from Blaricum and was elected Recycling Hero 2021 in the Netherlands in a competition run by the DWMA. On Global Recycling Day, 18 March, Rien was chosen as one of ten worldwide Recycling Heroes 2021. The organisation was impressed by his commitment and the contribution he has made towards a clean and sustainable world. Rien represents the many volunteers around the world who do what they can each day to help keep the living environment clean and tidy.

Chemical recycling

The DWMA has set up a working group to investigate the contribution chemical recycling can make towards the circular economy. In the long run, chemical recycling can provide an alternative option to mechanical recycling, particularly where mechanical recycling delivers insufficient high-quality secondary raw materials or where there is insufficient market potential for raw materials recovered via mechanical recycling. The Chemical Recycling Working Group of the DWMA assesses chemical recycling initiatives for their yield, quality of end product and environmental impact. When selecting new processing techniques these parameters should be assessed together. A key require-

More **raw materials recycling** in **value chains**

ment for the DWMA is that new techniques and existing recycling and processing techniques can operate side by side on a level playing field. The DWMA is keen to work with the chemical industry and the government on this issue and argues for a rigorous life cycle assessment in which the benefits and costs for carbon emissions are thoroughly investigated.

Circular building materials

In a circular economy the residues from waste-to-energy plants are put to new uses. Metal residues are used in metal production, while sand and bottom ash aggregate are upgraded into an unrestricted application building material and used in roadbuilding projects or as an aggregate in concrete products. The sector has made great efforts to improve the quality of the building materials derived from incinerator bottom ash and successfully completed the Green Deal with the government on the sustainable use of bottom ash in 2020. In 2021 the DWMA invited the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management to make new agreements on further improving the quality of circular building materials and increasing their market potential. To this end the sector wants to improve cooperation across

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the chain and amend standards and other requirements. Governments can play an important role in stimulating the use and acquisition of products made from bottom ash, including in their own public works. The sector can set up a system to register sales to the infrastructure, concrete, foundation and other markets to keep a record of where incinerator bottom ash products are used. The DWMA and the ministry are holding constructive talks on the proposal.

Substances of very high concern

Substances that we do not want to remain in consumption and production chains are handled with due care and sent for environmentally sound treatment in waste-to-energy plants or stored in landfills. They include substances of very high concern (SVHC). However, the list of SVHCs is long and the policy for SVHCs can prevent recycling. The DWMA is therefore in favour of a risk approach to determine whether or not the recycling of substances of concern is acceptable. Furthermore, the responsibility for providing information on the presence of SVHCs should rest with the manufacturers and discarders. Waste companies cannot know for certain exactly which SVHCs may be present in the waste they receive or collect. As waste streams consist of complex mixtures and are heterogeneous, testing them for all SVHCs is prohibitively expensive and unfeasible. In 2021 the DWMA committee on SVHCs produced a position paper which sets

out the sector's view on how to deal with SVHCs. The first priority is to ensure that products coming onto the market do not contain any SVHCs. When SVHCs that are already in circulation enter the waste phase, they must be kept separate from waste streams that do not contain SVHCs. Cooperation throughout the supply chain and producer responsibility for SVHCs are therefore very important. A fund and a track and trace system could be set up to track the progress of SVHCs through the chain.

Modernisation of landfill policy

Waste streams that are not recyclable or combustible are disposed of safely and with no negative environmental impact in landfills. To ensure that the maintenance of these landfills can be paid for in future, landfill policy should be modernised and the nominal interest rates for aftercare funds should be revised. The DWMA is in constructive talks with the government on this issue. The sector is working to make landfill sites sustainable. The midterm evaluation of the research programme on natural biodegradation in landfills (*introdunctie Duurzaam Stortbeheer*), which took place in 2021, clearly showed that sustainable landfill management is possible without any negative environmental impacts. The desired processes, such as the leaching of contaminants and the natural decomposition/stabilisation of organic material have been set in motion.

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SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

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In the circular economy the use of energy must be sustainable. The waste sector plays an important role in making the Dutch energy economy more sustainable and wants to further increase its contribution by recovering more heat from the same amount of waste. Moreover, by recovering as much energy as possible from waste we also reduce our dependence on fossil gas.

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Ten sustainable energy producers

The Dutch waste-to-energy plants (WtE plants), bio-energy plants, sludge incinerators, food waste anaerobic digesters and landfills currently deliver about 10% of the sustainable energy produced in the Netherlands. The total amount of energy recovered from waste continues to rise. In the coming period the waste sector will be an important source of sustainable electricity, heat, cold, steam and gas. It contributes 28% of the heat delivered by the main heat supply networks, 18% of which comes from the WtE plants. The bio-energy plants, which convert fully biogenic wastes into renewable energy, account for 7%. Residual heat is also supplied to the heat supply networks. About 11% of the steam supplied to industry comes from WtE plants.

Big demand for district heating

The Netherlands aims to gradually reduce its dependence on natural gas and make increasing use of sustainable sources. Heat from waste is a smart and sustainable alternative. The National Climate Agreement assumes the demand for district heating in 2030 will be 40 PJ. In 2019 the WtE plants supplied 5 PJ to district heating schemes and a further 8 PJ to industry. By further exploiting the market potential for heat, this amount can be increased considerably and in the process the sector would be contributing towards a more sustainable heat supply.

Heat from waste is a **smart** and **sustainable alternative**

More energy from the same amount of waste

Recovering and supplying more heat from existing treatment capacity will maximise the use of the available non-recyclable waste streams and increase the total amount of energy recovered from the same amount of waste. In the coming years the amount of heat and steam supplied by the sector can grow from 19 PJ to 29 PJ in 2030, of which about 17 PJ is renewable. This is equivalent to the average natural gas consumption of almost 800,000 households.

Heat and steam for households and industry

Both industry and households can be connected to heat and steam supply systems. The DWMA argues that several heat sources and multiple customers should be connected to these networks because this makes the system robust. It makes energy systems future-proof, avoids dependence on a specific technology or fuel, makes optimal use of the infrastructure, and the parties involved have greater security of supply.

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HEALTH & SAFETY

Cooperation throughout the chain for safe and healthy working

Health and safety is a top priority for the DWMA and its members and they have set up systems and made agreements to ensure continual improvements are made in this area. Despite all the efforts made, though, the number of accidents in the waste sector remains relatively high. The DWMA is working with its members on various fronts to raise the level of health and safety and is cooperating with the Dutch Labour Inspectorate.

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Cooperation with the Labour Inspectorate

The DWMA and the Labour Inspectorate have the same aim: to reduce the number of accidents. Cooperation with the government on health and safety was further strengthened in 2021. The DWMA consults regularly with the Labour Inspectorate and in the spring they held a joint meeting to get to know each other better and get a better understanding of each other's work. The meeting was held online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The topics discussed were the importance of cooperation and keeping each other up to date, and holding joint investigations into the causes of accidents and on how to improve health and safety in the waste sector.

Waste Fires Task Force

Fire safety is a question of continual vigilance. A frequent cause of fires is the presence of lithium batteries in the waste. Batteries are supposed to be handed in at special collection points, but in practice many batteries still end up in residual household waste. Preventing waste fires requires measures throughout the chain. The DWMA is working on this with the other parties in the Waste Fires Task Force, which is calling for stricter European rules on the proper disposal of batteries, on safe battery design and

Working together for a higher level of health and safety

on reducing the unnecessary use of lithium batteries. In the Task Force's view, the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management should raise the collection targets and there should be an incentive to dispose of batteries in the proper way, for example through the introduction of a cash 'return bonus'. Consumers need to be made more aware of the correct way to dispose of batteries.

Guidance on extreme weather conditions

In 2021, at the initiative of the DWMA the waste sector prepared a guidance document on how to neutralise the dangers of extreme weather. Extreme weather conditions, such as storms, snowfall, ice and tropical temperatures, are becoming increasingly common. The weather directly affects the work of the waste industry, which is why it is important that employees know how they must respond to such extreme weather conditions. The guidance has been incorporated into the Health and Safety Catalogue for the Waste Sector so that all businesses and organisations in the sector can make use of it.

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Safety Week

The Health and Safety Catalogue for the Waste Sector Foundation organised the Safety Week 2021 in the first week of June. The DWMA and its members once again took part in the event. Many companies emphasised traffic safety as vehicles are regularly involved in accidents, including accidents resulting in injury. Employers should keep traffic safety uppermost in the minds of their employees and maintain a permanent dialogue on the subject.

Amendments to the Working Conditions Decree

The government is in the process of revising the Working Conditions Decree to incorporate the new framework for the additional risk inventory and evaluation (ARIE) for major accidents involving hazardous substances. The proposed amendments published by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in 2021 will require more DWMA members to carry out an ARIE, but the proposal takes too little account of day-to-day practice. Accidents involving hazardous substances are rare in the waste sector. The DWMA is of the opinion that the risks would be adequately covered if the companies subject to the ARIE obligation were limited to those that fall under the Major Accidents (Risks) Decree, which includes a number of DWMA members.

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The Annual Review 2021 looks back on some of the important developments during the year.

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