



CO2 reduction potential by the European Waste Management Sector

Press release – Monday 24th January 2022

In a joint study, four European waste management associations: the European Waste Management Association (FEAD); the Confederation of European Waste-to-Energy Plants (CEWEP); the RDF Industry Group; and the Dutch Waste Management Association (DWMA), publish their findings for the potential for CO₂ reductions within the waste management sector. The research was conducted by Prognos and CE Delft, two well-known and established centres of research.

The study uses figures from 2018 as a baseline, and examines two projections in which EU CO₂ reduction potential in 2035 are compared, with the projections analysing waste management performance and recycling and landfill targets across EU27 and the UK. The results show significant avoided CO₂ emissions for the following 10 waste streams: paper, glass, plastics, ferrous metals, aluminium, wood, textiles, waste tyres, biowaste, and residual waste/WDF (non-separately collected waste and rejects from waste treatment/waste derived fuels).

In 2018, the waste industry was almost CO₂ neutral for the above-mentioned waste flows with only 13 Mt CO₂eq net emissions per year. This includes CO₂ savings from the manufacturing sector using materials and energy derived from waste.

By successfully applying current municipal waste legislation, and the same recycling and landfill targets to industrial and commercial waste (Projection 1) by 2035 across the EU27+UK, the CO₂ emission avoidance potential is significantly improved to -137 Mt CO₂eq, delivering a saving of 150 Mt CO₂eq. The savings potential would almost double in the more ambitious projection 2. The current baseline CO₂ net emission burden of 13 Mt CO₂eq in the 20-year perspective could drop to -283 Mt CO₂eq net emission avoidance which results in savings of 296 Mt CO₂eq.

In both projections, using the 20-year perspective, the key to achieving maximum CO₂ avoidance is to make full use of recycling and waste-to-energy capacities throughout EU27 and the UK.

FEAD President Peter Kurth reiterates: “Efficient waste management has the potential to deliver major contributions towards the Paris agreement. The climate challenge requires the full enforcement of existing EU legislation, strengthened by the EU Green Deal. We urge for the full implementation of recycling and landfilling targets, and we call on the EU legislator to set up further regulatory signals. Mandatory recycled content in products, strengthened ecodesign, positive Taxonomy rules for energy recovery to adequately cover residual waste, efficient intra-EU waste shipments rules for recovery and recycling, and strong public support for selective collection will be decisive. The whole waste management chain, represented by our four associations, is ready to engage in increased efforts and investments to realise the CO₂ savings potential of a more circular economy.”

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