

Bio-Waste - Need for EU-Legislation?

Brussels, 9 - 10 June 2009

Luc Vanacker



Speech Luc Vanacker

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Also on behalf of OVAM, the Public Waste Agency of Flanders, I would like to welcome you at this conference. It is a pleasure meeting you all in Belgium in Brussels, and to notice that there are so many of you interested in this congress.

On December the 3rd of last year, the European Commission published the Green Paper on bio-waste, providing us all the possibility to send in our views on the needed options for the management of bio-waste on European level. In the meanwhile, Arcadis Belgium and Eunomia, two study bureaus, are working under the authority of the European Commission on the impact assessment regarding the management of bio-waste on the European level. On the other hand we are confronted with the Directive on Renewable Energy, trying to give answers to the challenges of climate change and also looking to bio-waste as a part of the solution.

It shows us that bio-waste is a kind of a hot item; sometimes literally ... Do we recycle it to compost of outstanding quality that can be safely used on the soil, helping improving soil quality, adding to soil protection and indirectly helping to fight climate change? Or do we try to generate energy out of it, contributing to the goals of the Directive on renewable energy? Or maybe, can we combine both goals?

The different interests in this kind of waste, reflects some of the big challenges we are confronted with these days: fulfilling the goals of the landfill directive, fighting climate change, working on soil protection. Bio-waste is thus a hot topic indeed. And it is a topic that OVAM has been dealing with for many years.

Since the day that OVAM was founded, in 1981, waste has offered us many challenges. In the beginning we were confronted with too many, badly equipped landfills, threatening our citizens and our environment. It became a big challenge finding the proper solutions. Throughout the years, we found these solutions, step by step, searching for a mix of the right instruments leading us to our goal: the sustainable and sound management of waste.

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Nowadays OVAM is not only responsible for waste but also for material management. It is a clear translation of the shifting we need to make to 'cradle to cradle' not only focussing on how to get rid of waste in a good way but to think about rethinking processes and closing material circles.

It shouldn't be a surprise to you all that throughout the years, emphasizing prevention and stimulating recycling as much as possible, have been very important points of interest and still are. Also for bio-waste. It played and still plays an important role in our action plans. Not in the least while bio-waste accounts for 30 % to 45 % of municipal solid waste. While it is properly managed it can offer us many advantages but if not it is a threat to the environment and more specific to the soil, groundwater and the climate.

Prevention of bio-waste (cycle gardening and home composting) of course has to be the focus in the first place, while waste that isn't generated doesn't have to be treated. It is of great importance to pay enough attention to this aspect, to inform public and to raise awareness and to keep doing that without hesitation.

Further more experience has learnt us that an integrated approach is the key-word for bio-waste. Within Europe, Flanders – together with others in Europe – is one of the leading regions when it comes to the separate collection of bio-waste. These separately collected waste streams are processed into high-quality compost, which is useful for the soil. In addition, fermentation with continued composting of e.g. organic industrial waste not only results in treated digestate, which is useful for the soil, but also in the generation of renewable energy (in the form of biogas). It proves that a combination of separate collection, control of input streams and an adequate processing method combined with a proper quality follow-up system does indeed work, leading to a high-quality output stream.

So, if managed sustainable, bio-waste can thus not only make a considerable contribution to soil fertility and the fight against erosion and climate problems (e.g. via C sequestration). and can help achieving a recycling society, which is one of the major goals for the European Union.

It is one of the reasons Belgium and Flanders has been insisting on a European harmonisation with respect to bio-waste management for a long time. In different member

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states a lot of bio-waste is still being landfilled despite the goal of the landfill directive to divert biodegradable waste as much as possible away from landfills. Bio-waste that isn't landfilled, isn't necessarily treated along the principles of the European waste hierarchy, aiming for sustainable management of waste and aiming for the European union to become a recycling society.

And that 's a waste of the bio-waste, a missed opportunity.

A separate directive on bio-waste would provide the Member States with the necessary encouragement and support, the legal background to support investments and to work on a steady policy regarding bio-waste. A policy not only focussing on the treatment but certainly also on prevention, recycling combined with providing information, awareness rising to the public.

This is with no doubt a big challenge and a lot of member states need guidance in it.

While European harmonisation of the management of bio-waste at the EU-level is important for Belgium, we will pay attention to it during the Belgian Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2010.

The topic triggers many questions and we won't be able to answer them all today. But the main reason we are here gathered today and tomorrow is to exchange views, political and scientific and to work towards what we all want: a sustainable solution for bio-waste.

So I am very pleased to be able to offer you this conference together with the European Commission, the Environment Ministry of the Czech Republic and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany. I would like, in that matter address a special word of thanks to the permanent representation of the Federal Republic of Germany for hosting this conference and also for Germany for taking the initiative for organising this conference. And of course thank you to the speakers who are willing to share their knowledge and views with us today.

Thank you for your attention. I would like to wish you all a positive, inspiring conference and of course also an enjoyable dinner and evening!