



# PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

## WASTE IN THE NETHERLANDS

*Producer responsibility is an important component of Dutch policy on waste. It involves the person who markets a given product assuming full or partial responsibility for the disposal of that product in the waste phase. Producer responsibility has been implemented for the most important waste streams by means of agreements between producers and importers, by regulation or by a combination of the two.*

### DEFINITION

Waste disposal was traditionally the responsibility of the public authorities and the individuals or businesses which produced the waste. For some time now, however, the producers of products have been getting involved in the disposal of their products in an overall coordinating role. The argument underlying this development is that giving producers some or all of the financial and / or physical responsibility for managing their products in the waste phase will reduce environmental pressures.

This is because more account is then taken during design and production of the problems caused by the product in the waste phase ('design for recycling'). Opportunities to recycle materials or products can also be exploited more effectively. Producers are likely to know best what the possibilities are for recycling their product, and are in a position to feed the secondary materials generated back into the production process.

Another reason for giving producers a shared responsibility is that the waste management costs are factored into the price of the product (a process known as 'internalisation'). This is in line with the 'polluter pays' principle: the cost of processing the product in the waste phase is paid for when the product is purchased.

### WHICH PRODUCTS?

Producer responsibility has already been introduced for various products (see table), either on a voluntary basis, through regulation, or by a combination of the two.

SOME WASTE STREAMS FOR WHICH RESPONSIBILITY HAS BEEN OR IS BEING INTRODUCED

	Voluntary	Regulatory
End-of-life cars	x	x
Car tyres		x
Batteries		x
Packaging waste	x	x
Paper / cardboard	x	
Plastic films for agriculture	x	x
PVC exterior building materials	x	
PVC piping	x	
Hazardous photographic waste		x
Electrical and electronic equipment		x

### PUTTING PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY INTO PRACTICE

The way producer responsibility is actually put into practice differs from case to case. A balance has to be struck between costs and benefits, taking account of the effects on prevention, recycling and the internalisation of the costs on one hand, and the consequences in terms of the macro-economic costs, market forces, the free movements of goods, the dangers of a piecemeal approach to waste management, etc., on the other.

How responsibility is divided between the various parties depends on the circumstances surrounding each type of product.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The introduction of producer responsibility will have demonstrable benefits for the environment:

**End-of-life vehicles:** the establishment of Autorecycling Nederland (ARN) by car importers and manufacturers and others has led to increased material recycling and has had a beneficial

effect on the operations of vehicle dismantlers. Participating companies are already taking in 90% of all end-of-life vehicles, and some 86% of the materials are being recycled.



**Batteries:** battery producers and importers have set up the Batteries Association (STIBAT) which organises and funds the collection and recycling of used batteries. It also organises public information campaigns to boost collection rates. In 1999, 69% of used batteries were collected separately.

**Packaging:** the 'Packaging Covenant II' was agreed at the end of 1997: producers and importers agree to take responsibility for the recovery and recycling of the packaging they have marketed. A recycling rate of approximately 63% is achieved. Local authorities play an important role in this, since they promote the separate collection of glass, used paper and cardboard.

**Used paper and cardboard:** the sector has provided local authorities with a guarantee that it will not charge to take back paper and cardboard collected separately from households. This provides a good basis for local authorities to step up their collection efforts, since it removes the financial risk associated with having to sell the paper and cardboard they collect when prices are low. Local authorities have undertaken to increase the proportion of suitable paper and cardboard collected separately from households to 85%. In 1999, 62% of used paper and cardboard were collected separately.

**Agricultural and horticultural plastic film:** the Agricultural and Horticultural Plastic Film (Disposal) Decree makes all importers and producers of plastic film used for agricultural and horticultural purposes responsible for the collection and processing of the discarded material. A total of 16,000 tonnes per year of these products are sold in the Netherlands. The aim is to increase the recycling rate from 56% (1999) to 70%.

### 'FREE RIDERS'

Where producers assume their responsibilities on a voluntary basis there is a risk that some companies will not commit themselves; these companies are sometimes referred to as 'free riders'. In order to prevent distortion of the market the Environmental Management Act gives the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment the power to declare an agreement between producers / importers on the funding of a system for collecting and processing a particular product binding on the entire sector. The Minister can be requested to do so if such an initiative is supported by 75% of the sector in question. A decision to make an agreement universally binding in this way has already been taken for a number of products (cars, paper and cardboard, plastic films used for agriculture and horticulture).

### EUROPE

Producer responsibility is also being introduced at the European level. The Directive on End-of-Life Vehicles, which entered into force in 21 October 2000, spells out the principle of producer responsibility. Producer responsibility will also be introduced at European level for electrical and electronic goods. A draft directive is currently under discussion, and is expected to enter into force in mid-2002.



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**NB: This is one of a series of factsheets on waste  
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