

# Meeting the challenge of Proper Management of Hazardous Waste

## Vice-President Katainen's speech

Eurits Autumn Conference - 21 November 2018

On 21 November 2018 during the Eurits Autumn Conference, the European Commission's Vice-President Katainen gave the following speech on 'the role of the hazardous waste sector in making the Circular Economy a sustainable reality':

*The transition towards a circular economy can bring a triple win: for the economy, for the environment and for society. It is important that the content value is not lost or released but circulates within the economy in a safe manner.*

*It is clear that to make circular economy a reality we need to create an efficient market for secondary raw materials. However, it will never happen if we are not successful in guaranteeing safety of the re-used materials.*

***The hazardous waste incineration sector continues to be a vital contributor to safe and resource-efficient waste management in the Union, as an important way of dealing with materials that should not remain in circularity. In that regard, your sector is a gatekeeper of the Circular Economy.***

*This function places a special responsibility on the entire sector and its performance will determine whether the circular economy is a success story in Europe.*

*That is why I want to take this opportunity to thank EURITS for your constructive support during the negotiation process on the recently adopted Waste legislation.*

*Your contribution was particularly instrumental in strengthening of the separation obligation and inclusion of a specific decontamination obligation for recovery operations.*

*You have also greatly helped in securing that hazardous waste management will be also improved by better record keeping through electronic register for better traceability.*

*The compromises reached are well-balanced. The outcome of this review of the Waste Framework Directive will be a considerable strengthening of the hazardous waste management and traceability provisions and will contribute to improved and quality recycling.*

*However, these improvements are only part of the grand design for future circular materials in Europe.*

*We believe that strong Circular Economy needs to be driven by market demand and fair competition between materials independently of their origin.*

*Here, we need to recall that as much as 70% of chemical products classify as hazardous. These substances still play an important role in the economy and provide numerous critical functions for society, provided the chemicals safety legislation and risk management are applied appropriately.*

*However, not all hazard substances are equal. The challenges faced by the manufacturing and the waste management sectors, in particular as regards the presence of substances of concern in recovered materials, are analysed in the Commission Communication on the Interface between the Chemical, Product and Waste legislation.*

*The Interface established the following overarching objective: "Materials should be safe, fit-for-purpose and designed for durability, recyclability and low environmental impact. These materials and the articles made from them should, to the extent possible, be designed, manufactured, traded and recycled free from substances of concern. The reason being that they may be reused and eventually disposed of in a way that maximises the materials' economic benefits and utility to society while maintaining a high level of human health and environmental protection."*

*However, we do recognise that for recovered materials containing "legacy substances" this may not be possible in the short term and that decisions must be made on whether to recover materials containing some amount of hazardous substances, for further use, or to destroy them.*

*In these cases, we have to take a deep look at the overall long-term impacts:*

- *is the continued use of materials containing such legacy substances better for climate, jobs and exposure to health and the environment*

*Or*

- *is it better to safely incinerate that material, recovering energy from it where possible, and substitute it with other primary material?*

*The hazardous waste management sector has an important role to play in striking the right balance between recovery and final disposal of materials that become waste.*

*This is because they have the right tools and technologies to remove substances of concern from waste and, if this is not possible, to destroy these materials, obtaining energy during the process.*

*We have recognised that currently there is no specific framework to deal with the presence of substances of concern in recycled materials and in articles made from them.*

*In particular, there is no agreed methodology to determine the overall costs and benefits for society of the use of recycled materials containing such substances compared to disposal, including, inter alia, the potential of recovering energy from waste and the impacts of production of primary materials in case recycling is prevented.*

*This is why the Commission has launched a project to develop a methodology that should support decision making about when it is best to recycle and when it is best to destroy materials containing substances of concern. The outcome is expected by the second quarter of 2019.*

*The hazardous waste management sector is already contributing to the efforts towards circularity by developing recovery technologies for substances such as solvents or used lubricating oils or by developing decontamination technologies for certain substances in plastics, for instance to remove certain flame retardants from polystyrene foams that were used as insulation in the construction sector.*

*Sometimes decontamination of waste is not technically viable and the destruction of the waste offers the best environmental outcome. In these circumstances, capacity of waste-to-energy installations throughout Europe should mirror the needs in terms of both nominal capacity and technological performance to ensure destruction of the substances of concern. It is important to ensure that the incineration technologies are themselves environmentally sound.*

*With this thought, I wish you all productive and fruitful discussion. I do hope we will continue working closely together to make circular economy a reality.*

His speech is available on the European Commission's website:

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/katainen/announcements/vice-president-katainen-speech-eurits-autumn-conference-brussels-21-november-2018\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/katainen/announcements/vice-president-katainen-speech-eurits-autumn-conference-brussels-21-november-2018_en)

Photos of his speech published by the European Commission audio-visual services:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/photo/photoByReportage.cfm?ref=038760&sitelang=en>

European Commission's announcement on Twitter:

[https://twitter.com/EC\\_AVService/status/1065252318092890112](https://twitter.com/EC_AVService/status/1065252318092890112)