



# Waste recycling in the Netherlands: analysis of the success

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**The Netherlands is among EU champion countries for waste recycling. Analysis of this success by Mrs. Wilma Mansveld.**

**The Netherlands is one of the countries praised by the EU for its waste treatment methods, especially recycling. Can you explain the reasons for such performance?**

Our country has led the way in waste management for many years: about 78% of the Dutch waste is recycled and 19% is incinerated. Only 3% goes to landfill, compared to the EU average of 40%. These figures underscore our country's commitment to recycling, and reflect good business sense on the part of Dutch waste management companies. Encouraged by EU policy, they are continually developing and introducing new recycling techniques and methods. Striving for better waste management means always being on the lookout for new developments and innovations.

There are several reasons for our good track record in this area. First and perhaps most importantly, is the close cooperation between industry and local, provincial and national authorities. In the Netherlands, we recognise working together as a key factor in effective waste management. A clear division of responsibilities is a second reason. Legislation and the national waste management plan clearly set out who is responsible for what.

Another reason for our success is that we saw the importance of protecting the environment, and recycling, fairly early on. In the late 1960s we found

out that environmental pollution in the Netherlands was much worse than we'd assumed. That resulted in sectoral legislation, that is, separate laws for each type of environmental problem.

A fourth reason is the concept of producers' responsibility, introduced in 1990. We decided producers should still be responsible for their products in the waste phase. This later became an important instrument in both national and international legislation (e.g. on car wrecks and waste from electrical and electronic equipment). Finally, financial instruments have also played an important role. Examples are landfill tax, producers' responsibility for several products, and differential rates for household waste collection. The introduction of landfill tax in 1995 led to a sharp decline in the need for orders and injunctions to achieve full capacity utilisation of waste incineration plants. In the end, the tax could be abolished because waste companies no longer needed the disincentive for landfill disposal.

**How are the various treatment methods organised, given the non-negligible part of incineration?**

As I mentioned before, only 3% of waste goes to landfill while 78% is recycled. So incineration is not the main treatment method in the Netherlands. How waste treatment is organised depends on the waste

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stream. It would take several pages to describe the entire system, so I will only give a brief outline. Currently, 75% of the remaining capacity for landfill and 60% of the incineration capacity is in public hands. The City of Amsterdam, for instance, has its own incineration plant. Others are owned by groups of municipalities – like HVC, which is owned by 48 municipalities and 6 water authorities. Provincial authorities are the main shareholders of companies like Attero.

Composting facilities are run by both public and private companies, while private companies carry out most of the recycling activities: crushing and sorting building/demolition waste, treating and recycling glass, paper and metals, and so on. Legislation known as product decrees lays down rules for the collection and recycling of several waste streams, including cars, tyres, electrical equipment, packaging waste and batteries.

Household waste collection is a municipal responsibility. Local authorities decide how the waste is collected, and by whom (a municipal service or a private company). The collection of all other waste is the responsibility of business and industry.

## **What are the perspectives and the main projects in your country in the field of waste treatment?**

We have to change the way people think about waste in general and move towards a circular economy and resource efficiency.

In achieving this transition, the programme 'From waste to raw material' is a key policy instrument. A circular economy means achieving a closed chain

in which the parties in the chain know each other, understand each other and complement each other. So, if a flowerpot manufacturer wants to use recycled plastic, it is essential for the recycler to know what requirements the plastic must meet, and for all the parties involved in collecting and sorting the plastic to take these requirements into account. Good cooperation within the chains is a prerequisite.

The 'From waste to raw material' programme focuses on the 'pack' and on the 'leaders'. Its main elements are strategic use of market incentives, a dynamic legislative framework that promotes green growth and innovation, innovation, and government in the role of network partner. The main programme objectives are creating legislative and financial instruments that support the transition to a circular economy, encouraging recycling of secondary raw materials, and creating scope for innovation and growth. The programme also addresses specific chains and waste streams, and encourages the development of financial and other market incentives.

The Netherlands is a frontrunner, but innovation and more cooperation are necessary if we want to stay in the lead. An important target is to increase the percentage of household waste that is recycled from 50% to 65%. In the Netherlands, each person produces about 500 kg of waste a year. That's about 1.5 kg of waste a day. For the country as a whole that would fill about 24 football stadiums. We still throw away valuable materials which could also be used in making other products. Other important goals that we're pursuing are better collection and recycling of packaging waste, especially plastics, and curbing or banning microplastics.



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