

Retail Agreement on Waste

9 October 2012

State of Play

Waste is a major environmental problem and is still growing in importance. A fundamental cultural change in behaviour is vital to address the issue of waste and the other environmental challenges and pave the way to a resource efficient and sustainable economy and society.

Retailers are a large contributor to the EU economy. Despite the current economic crisis, retailers are committed to remain responsible actors, and are keen to play their part in addressing societal issues.

Natural resources are becoming scarce, and retailers fully agree on the need to preserve them. Retailers therefore increasingly see waste as a valuable resource in its own right and are taking steps to reuse materials wherever possible so as to reduce reliance on raw-material inputs.

Waste management, and especially waste prevention and reduction, is a core objective of most retailers. Many retailers have already set up waste prevention and reduction programmes with ambitious targets, which are furthermore regularly reviewed. They focus primarily on the way their companies operate. They continuously strive to reduce their waste in their operations with all the means at their disposal in the segments of the supply chain where they may have a direct control (logistics, product design, packaging, recycling etc.).

Retailers also often collaborate very closely with suppliers. They use their expertise to help their suppliers improve their production process so as to reduce the overall environmental footprint of their activities and the products they supply them with.

Looking Ahead

The challenges in the field of waste are collective. Waste represents a cost for the environment but also for society at large. Retailers are committed to play a role in the waste recovery chain and participate in the overall efforts of preventing and reducing waste further.

Despite being a minor direct contributor to waste, retailers are fully aware that many products which become waste are bought in their stores or on-line. On average every citizen living in the EU throws away around half a tonne of household rubbish every year.

For many products, the environmental impact of the waste generated is highest at the consumer level. Adapting and/or changing behaviour is essential to reduce it. Retailers are therefore committed to instigate, encourage and accompany consumers in their efforts to reduce the environmental footprint derived from waste. The retail sector is in a strategic position to do this. It wants to put its knowledge of consumers, its proximity to them and its extensive experience in communicating and informing them to raise awareness about waste issues.

With this agreement, retailers intend to further reach out to their customers and involve them in the cultural change needed to address the waste prevention and reduction issue, thereby contributing to paving the way to a resource efficient and sustainable economy and society.

Commitment

Measuring waste reduction at consumer level is very difficult in the absence of the involvement of other players, such as local authorities. This agreement will therefore focus on raising awareness. Each food retailer will carry out awareness raising initiatives on food waste and how households can reduce it. For non-food retailers, the awareness-raising initiatives will focus on their main product range e.g. textiles, EEE. Each company will decide on an individual basis, the exact scope of the initiatives.

As responsible retail companies, each signatory to this agreement commits to:

For food retailers¹:

1. Carrying out, at least, two awareness raising initiatives on a global and/or national level by end of June 2014 on waste reduction.

These initiatives should focus on providing consumers with e.g.:

- general advice on how they can reduce the amount of food waste they generate e.g. how to handle, store and use food more efficiently
- information about the actual meaning of “use-by” and “best before” dates in collaboration with the Commission’s information campaign
- innovative marketing tools: shopping lists for consumers, information on prevention, etc.

2. Progress will be measured on the basis of the number of initiatives, the number of people reached by these initiatives. The latter will be calculated according to the number of visitors to the website, and/or the number of footfall in the stores etc.

3. Signatories will report on their initiatives by providing the relevant documentation (links to website, photos, reports etc.)

For non-food retailers:

1. Carrying out at least two awareness-raising initiatives on a global or national level by end of June 2014 focusing on their main product range e.g. textiles, EEE.

These initiatives should focus on providing consumers with e.g. information on the various collection, reuse and recycling options available to consumers including any voluntary take-back and/or incentive for re-use, and the importance of correctly disposing of products.

2. Progress will be measured on the basis of the number of initiatives, the number of people reached by these initiatives. The latter will be calculated according to the number of flyers, and/or, the number of visitors to the website, and/or, the number of footfall in the stores etc.

3. Signatories will report on their initiatives by providing the relevant documentation (flyers, links to website, photos, reports etc.).

The REAP secretariat will collect the documentation of the signatories about the different initiatives and summarise them in a report published to coincide with the 2014 annual event. This report will be distributed to all retail associations for further dissemination.



¹ Food waste at retail level is limited: approximately 5% of the total amount of food waste along the supply chain. This results from improved logistics and monitoring. For food still fit for consumption, retailers often collaborate with food banks. Retailers also reuse or recycle unsold products. For example, organic waste is often recycled by fermenting it or by processing it into methane gas.