

Brussels, 8 February 2001

Commission adopts green paper on integrated product policy

The European Commission has adopted a Green Paper on an Integrated Product Policy. Its central objective is to improve the environmental performance of a broad range of products throughout their life cycle. The Green Paper proposes a strategy to strengthen and refocus product-related environmental policies to promote the development of a market for greener products. The products of the future should use less resources, have lower impacts and risks to the environment and prevent waste generation already at the conception stage. Integrated Product Policy has equally been announced as one of the major innovative elements of the 6th Environmental Action Programme and is one of the environmental priorities for the Swedish Presidency of the Council. The Green Paper is intended to launch a broad debate on how to achieve a new growth paradigm and a higher quality of life through wealth creation and competitiveness on the basis of greener products.

Welcoming the adoption by the Commission, Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström declared: "This Green Paper is a major step towards the practical implementation of the approaches put forward in 6th Environmental Action Programme. It is a way to ensure that the products of the future have a higher value, use less resources and take into account citizens' concerns on health and the environment. Products are fundamental to the wealth of our society and the quality of life we all enjoy. But rising consumption of products is, directly or indirectly, also at the source of most of the pollution and depletion of resources our society causes."

"The Green Paper is an opportunity for all stakeholders, Member States and the European Parliament to contribute to shaping a policy which encourages producers to tackle environmental problems before they arise and which can give consumers and public authorities the tools to actively support the greening of products in their purchase decisions. It introduces a cradle-to-grave or rather a cradle-to-cradle approach and will at the same time benefit consumers, the environment and business. It is a policy that offers both environmental and economic opportunities."

IPP Requires a Mix of Instruments

IPP has three overarching goals based on fundamental economic principles:

- First, to stimulate consumer **demand** for greener products. This can only be achieved through easily accessible, understandable and credible information. The main instruments put forward in the Green Paper to achieve this are various types of eco-labelling. Public authorities can also take the lead and give an important kick-start to greener markets through public procurement.

- Second to stimulate business leadership in the **supply** of green products. Instruments put forward in this context include the generation and flow of life cycle information, eco-design guidelines, and the integration of environmental aspects into standardisation. One new element proposed in the Green Paper is the creation of product panels comprising key stakeholders.
- Third, to use the **price mechanism** to develop markets for greener products. Instruments here could include differentiated taxation e.g. reduced VAT rates on eco-labelled products; an extension of the producer responsibility concept to new areas; and, the use of state aid policy within the New Guidelines on State Aid for Environmental Protection.

Broad public debate

Achieving these goals will require a broad dialogue with stakeholders. The Green Paper launches a broad public debate during the first half of 2001. This debate includes stakeholder consultation events to be started on 8 and 9 March with a Workshop on the overall strategy. The first day will be dedicated to presentations of the paper and practical experiences in the Member States and working group sessions on the various elements of the Green Paper. The second day will be dedicated to presentations by Commissioner Wallström and the Swedish Environment minister Kjell Larsson on the broader political perspectives and the discussions in Council.

The Commission is keen to ensure that the candidate countries are engaged in the debate on this innovative new policy from the outset. To that end, representatives of the candidate countries will be invited to participate in the workshop and will be closely involved in all further actions in the field.

In addition to this workshop, a series of specific events and meetings on particular subjects with the various interest groups is planned. There is also an open invitation for comments by anyone who wishes to contribute to this process before 30 June 2001. The result of the stakeholder consultation shall be presented in the form of a Communication scheduled for the second half of 2001. All relevant information on the Green Paper and the planning of stakeholder events will be made available on the following website:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/ipp>

Comments and questions can be sent to the following e-mail address:
env-ippstakeholder@cec.eu.int.