

Brussels, 11 October 2002

Commission welcomes agreement on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment and the Restriction of Hazardous Substances

The European Commission has welcomed the agreement between the European Parliament and the Council in yesterday evening's conciliation meeting on the Commission Proposal to introduce mandatory collection, re-use and recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) throughout the European Union. The Commission has also welcomed the agreement on the related proposal to restrict the use of hazardous substances in new electronic equipment (RoHS). Waste electrical and electronic equipment is the fastest growing part of the waste stream today. Each European produces on average around 14 kg per year of these wastes. Currently, 90% of this waste is landfilled or incinerated without any pre-treatment.

Welcoming the agreement between the Parliament and the Council as a landmark in achieving more sustainable waste management, Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström commented: "In Europe we are fortunate to enjoy vast consumer choice when it comes to electrical and electronic equipment. But now we can be confident that when we dispose of our mobile phone, video recorder or PC they are not simply landfilled and creating waste mountains. The consumer will be able to return equipment at its end of life free of charge and send it for environmentally sound treatment, re-use and recycling. And I am particularly happy that we could convince Member States to strengthen the individual responsibility of producers for the waste from their products. This will be an important incentive to producers take the environmental consequences into account already when they stand around the design table".

The Directive will largely eliminate the risks for the environment from such disposal. Re-use and recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment will save valuable resources and reduce environmental pollution from the production of virgin materials. The related proposal on the restriction of hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment will make sure that substances that may pose a risk at the waste stage are no longer used in new equipment, if appropriate replacements are available. This concerns in particular heavy metals and certain brominated flame retardants which shall be phased out in the proposal. Electrical and electronic equipment are an important source of such substances in the waste stream. For example, around 40% of all lead in landfills and 50% of lead in incinerators comes from such equipment.

Member States will have to set up collection systems for waste electrical and electronic equipment, take measures so that WEEE is collected separately and achieve a binding target of 4 kg per capita/per year for the separate collection of WEEE from private households. All costs from the collection points to the environmentally sound treatment, re-use and recycling will be covered by producers for their own products. They will have to provide a financial guarantee at the moment a new product is put on the market. This financial guarantee shall ensure that the management of the waste will be paid by the producer once the equipment reaches its end of life. The producer will, however, also have the choice of either managing the waste on an individual basis or participating in collective schemes. This is an important departure from existing schemes where producers pay a flat rate contribution for the recycling of waste from so-called historical products (i.e. products put on the market years ago). Such schemes are still necessary to collect funds for the recycling of old products for which no provisions have been made at the time when they were put on the market and, for these products, this system will continue to apply for a certain time. However, once the new rules will be fully implemented, producers who design their products for re-use and recycling will be rewarded by lower costs for the treatment of their waste.

The Parliament and the Council also agreed to a ban on four heavy metals (lead, cadmium, mercury and hexavalent chromium) and the brominated flame retardants PBB and PBDE from 1 July 2006. Existing national measures on these substances can continue to apply until that date, by which they have to be replaced by the new Community rules. A list of exemptions for certain applications for which currently there is no technical replacement shall be reviewed periodically with a view to progressively reducing these exemptions.