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Import of waste subject to authorisation rose in 2007

Federal Environment Agency publishes statistics for 2007

Germany imported about 6.2 million tonnes (mn t) of waste subject to authorisation in 2007. After a two-year decline, imports have resumed their climb despite the ban on storage of organic wastes that entered into force in 2005. However, this volume is still below the record set in 2004 (6.5 mn t). Exports on the other hand dropped slightly to 1.8 mn t. Expert estimates for 2008 reveal no significant changes over 2007. Wastes subject to authorisation are those with hazardous contents such as used oil or containing lead, or environmentally problematic materials like sewage sludge or treated wood.

Most imported waste continues to come from the Netherlands (2.3 mn t), Italy (1.3 mn t), followed by France, Belgium, and Ireland with volumes of about 380,000 t from each. It consists mainly of slags, ash, and filter dust (1.5 mn t), waste from treated wood (1.1 mn t), residual waste from sorting facilities (600,000 t), manure and sewage sludge (500,000 t), contaminated soil (370,000 t), waste oil and used solvents (240,000 t).

Germany's exports mainly consist of residual waste from sorting facilities, (500,000 t), treated wood wastes (230,000 t), horse manure (220,000 t), slags, ash, and filter dust (190,000 t), as well as unsorted domestic waste (160,000 t). Main destinations are the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Switzerland (about 300,000 t each), and Poland accepting 200,000 t.

Most of the waste imported into Germany is either recycled (2.5 mn t), incinerated (1.9 mn t) or stored in landfills (780,000 t).

1.2 mn t of waste exported from Germany was either recycled or partially reclaimed, and some 640,000 t was incinerated.

Trade volume of wastes not subject to authorisation, e.g. scrap metal, waste glass, used paper, plastic and textile wastes, also rose over the previous year. According to preliminary figures from the Federal Statistical Office, exports amount to 19.4 mn t, imports to 14.1 mn t. The main import/export partner is once again the Netherlands, with a total volume of 11 mn t.

The most significant non-European export country for waste not subject to authorisation is the People's Republic of China, which accepts 1.4 mn t for recycling.

Waste as a tradeable good to be imported and exported has been factual for quite some time. The European market and the principle of the free movement of goods expressly allows for

transboundary shipment of waste. The objective of this regulation is to bring waste to a destination that disposes of efficient and modern waste treatment technology. It can make sense, therefore, to recycle or reclaim waste abroad rather than dispose of it domestically. Nevertheless, there are important restrictions in place to protect the environment. All import or export of waste that might affect the environment requires authorisation by public administrations, which aims to prevent improper disposal at dumping prices. Export of hazardous waste to states that are not members of the industrialised nations within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is prohibited.

There are various reasons for the increase in import volumes for more than ten years: on the one hand Germany has modern disposal installations and free capacity that is lacking in other countries. In addition, waste type is also relevant, as for example dry poultry manure from the Netherlands is applied as fertiliser on German farmland, whereas this is not done in the Netherlands itself because more waste is incurred there than can be used effectively on farmland.

In areas near borders short transport routes between source of waste and disposal location account for much of the transboundary import and export of waste.

The relatively high export volume at present owes largely to the ban on storage of organic waste in landfills which went into effect in 2005.

More detailed statistics and information available on the Internet at
<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/abfallwirtschaft/abfallstatistik/basel.htm>.

Dessau-Roßlau, 24 July 2008

Graph: Development in export and import of waste, 1995-2007.

Source: Federal Environment Agency

