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Recyclables bin: made simpler to assure high-quality recycling

UBA invites dialogue on new ideas in waste separation

Separating waste is, in fact, not a difficult task: organic waste, paper, and glass are put into special bins or containers. Consumers can deliver used electronics and bulky waste to municipal collection points for recycling. Lightweight packaging is sorted to the yellow bin (*Gelbe Tonne*). Waste sorting is about to become even simpler as the yellow bin is expanded to include other recyclable materials. Consumers can dispose of yogurt cups and milk cartons in addition to various other metals and plastics in the new bins. At present, too many reusable materials are disposed of with other household waste even though it much of it could be recycled. Experts at the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) have estimated that a new single bin for recyclable materials could successfully redeem up to seven additional kilogrammes of waste per person and year besides packaging only, which could then be recycled.

Just how this new recyclables bin might work in practice was the topic of a discussion to which UBA in Dessau-Roßlau had invited some 180 experts on 28 February 2011. Three UBA research projects demonstrate that collection of recyclable materials in a single bin has great advantages. However, there are more indications than research findings alone to advocate extending the system of separate collection in a recyclables bin to include packaging as well as "comparable non-packaging" made of metals and plastics. From a consumer perspective, the current practice of being able to recycle the plastic yogurt cup with the yellow bin-- but not the plastic toy made of the same material- doesn't make sense. What exactly is meant to be collected in the recyclables bin besides packaging waste? The answer to this looks good as concerns plastics and metals such as those in an old frying pan, toys or pails. What does not belong in the new recyclables bin are things such as products with a high pollutant content and products for which separate functional collection systems have already been set up, e.g. batteries or textiles, which should be separated and disposed of in their own specially designated bins. Small used electronic and electrical devices are also better suited for separate collection than in a common recyclables bin.

Until a single recyclables bin can be put into widespread use, a few key questions need to be explored. UBA will moderate a business game on the continued development of the Packaging Ordinance in the course of the next few months, exploring and testing various options with respect to organisation, finance, collection, sorting, and recycling. All stakeholders, that is

municipalities, waste management companies, industry, trade, and environmental and consumers associations, will be taken into consideration.

Background: Packaging Ordinance

Starting in the early 1990s, the Packaging Ordinance decreed that packaging should be collected separately and recycled largely via the yellow bin. Collection, sorting and recycling are financed by producers and distributors who set up so-called dual systems. Modern sorting and recycling technologies now achieve recycling rates of about 80 percent, which is exemplary even on an international scale.

The Packaging Ordinance already offers dual systems waste management companies and municipalities the means to agree on collective recovery of comparable non-packaging waste. The draft of a new Act for Promoting Closed Substance Cycle ("Kreislaufwirtschaftsgesetz") will pursue this avenue whereby a new ordinance would facilitate introduction of a single recyclables bin throughout the country.

The final reports to the three UBA research projects have been published in the Texte series and are available for free download at: *Bestimmung der Idealzusammensetzung der Wertstofftonne* [Optimised allocation of waste items to a "dry recyclables" bin]: <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4074.html>

Finanzierungsmodelle der Wertstofftonne [Financing options for the "dry recyclables bin"]:
<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4077.html>

Evaluierung der Verpackungsverordnung [Evaluation of the Packaging Ordinance]:
<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4072.html>

Dessau-Roßlau, 28 February 2011