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Joint press release with the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the German Federal Ministry for Environment (BMU), the Federal Environment Agencies of Germany (UBA-D) and Austria (UBA-A) and the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW - Austria)

Re-Source conference

Three countries join forces to preserve natural resources

The Re-Source conference brings together experts and stakeholders from science, politics, public administration, industry and trade from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland to continue their dialogue and close cooperation in the area of sustainable resource management. It aims to promote more rapid implementation of strategies and action programmes and to make gains in the sustainable use of natural resources worldwide. The first Re-Source conference was held in Berlin in 2009.

The battle against pollution and destruction of the environment has been waged for three decades. Instructions, bans, threshold levels and standards imposed at installations and on entire systems have had positive effect, but these measures have had only little impact on the use (or waste) of resources and finite sources of energy. "Materials need to be handled and treated differently," said Xaver Edelmann of the Swiss Federal Laboratory for Material Science and Technology (Empa) in the welcoming address to Re-Source 2011, held on 8 - 9 November 2011 in St. Gallen. He said, "We must distance ourselves from the throwaway society." Karl Kienzl, Deputy Director of Austria's Federal Environment Agency, said, "In the absence of lifestyle changes towards more sustainability, increases in efficiency will be offset by the increased demand for material goods."

Development in recent years has emphasised increased materials and energy efficiency - in order to maintain and boost prosperity in the industrialised world, and to achieve an adequate standard of living in developing and emerging economies. Although increases in energy are absolutely necessary, they alone do not suffice in the long term and demand a decrease in the consumption of resources. The principles of sustainable development must also apply to the use of natural resources. "The national and European ambition must be to make prosperity and economic growth more independent of resource consumption and to enable a switch to energy saving, low emissions and a sustainable competitive economy," said Thomas Rummeler of Germany's Federal Ministry for Environment at the start of the conference.

States must coordinate action strategies

Opportunities to take action already exist at the local level. Consumers, policymakers and industry may well exert influence but the challenges are at the global level. They must collaborate if they wish to avert market distortions and competitive disadvantages in their regions. The use of natural resources must be negotiated between nations as well as today's and future generations.

Innovations and investments vested in a global economy call for:

- sending political signals and concrete proposals, national laws and international agreements
- new models of prosperity that are sustained without a steady rise in resource consumption
- adequate, transparent information with which consumers can make responsible decisions about the goods and services they purchase.

The three countries will portray concepts of sustainable resource management by introducing a number of successful 'lighthouse projects' that trace the entire value-added chain from extraction of the raw material to disposal or recycling of the end product. Whereas technical and organisational measures are key in raw material extraction, production, distribution and disposal, consumer purchasing behaviour is motivated by subjective influences. Swiss delegates will address in talks how objective criteria might be applied in this regard. The final plenary session will focus on models of growth and prosperity which will prove key in defining the course of resource management in the long term.

For more information about the conference click here: www.re-source2011.ch

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