

Conciliation on Waste

Following two readings and a conciliation procedure, the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament agreed in October that a single directive would cover the incineration of both hazardous and non-hazardous waste. Both the full Council and the Parliament must now endorse the joint text, with the latter expected to hold its third reading during its November plenary session in Strasbourg.

The directive covers both incineration and co-incineration of waste. For co-incineration, which takes place mostly in cement kilns, emission limit values are laid down in an annex. However, if over 40 per cent of the waste incinerated in such plants is hazardous waste or untreated mixed municipal waste, the plants must meet the tougher standards of a different annex, governing incineration standards. At Parliament's initiative, the limit for nitrogen oxides (NO_x) was lowered from 800 mg/m^3 to 500 mg/m^3 for new co-incineration plants.

Various types of incineration plant are excluded from the directive's scope. The Commission had sought to exclude vegetable waste from agriculture, forestry and food processing. At its second reading, Parliament added fibrous waste from virgin pulp production and from paper produced from pulp if it is co-incinerated, and it managed to push this point through in conciliation. Another point Parliament successfully insisted on was that plants which incinerate

radioactive waste should be explicitly excluded from the scope of the directive.

Another crucial point was the operating conditions of incinerating plants. Parliament had sought to tighten up the wording of the text at second reading by stipulating that for waste containing more than one per cent of halogenated organic substances, expressed as chlorine, the temperature must be raised to 1100°C for at least two minutes. The Council Common Position had set no time period here, providing for time limits only in the case of hazardous waste containing more than one per cent of chlorine. The compromise reached in conciliation refers to the two-minute period but limits its application to hazardous waste only.

A further successful demand made by Parliament was that heat generated during incineration should be recovered as far as practicable, and that this should be a crucial point in granting a permit for an incineration plant.

Other important amendments to the Common Position called for better access to information for the public. Here too, Parliament prevailed despite considerable resistance from Council. Plans for the construction of new incineration plants must now be published in a more transparent way. An annual report also has to be made available to the public for all plants that incinerate more than two tonnes of waste per hour. All smaller plants have to be listed in a publication that should be easily accessible. (MJ)

