WEEELABEX - WEEE LABEL OF EXCELLENCE. European Standards for Treatment and Recycling of E&E Waste and for Monitoring the Processing Companies

LIFE07 ENV/B/000041

Project description

Environmental issues

Beneficiaries

Administrative data

Read more

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Project description:

Background

In 2010, around 7.9 million tonnes of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) was generated across the 27 member states of the EU, plus Norway and Switzerland. According to official figures, less than half of that quantity, 3.1 million tonnes, was collected, treated and reported to the authorities. However, effective management of WEEE is essential given its content of hazardous substances such as mercury, brominated flame retardants, polychlorinated biphenyls, cadmium and volatile fluorocarbons.

The 2002 EU WEEE Directive (2002/96/EC) outlines responsibilities and targets for the collection, recycling and recovery of WEEE in all 27 Member States. The overall aim is for the EU to recycle at least 85% of WEEE by 2016. WEEE management is becoming an increasingly cross-border activity with significant competitive pressures. It is important that WEEE management companies do not gain a competitive advantage from implementing less environmentally friendly practices.

Currently, consumers and producers have to pay in different ways for the management of WEEE without being aware of the performance of this service. Standards are required to regulate collection, sorting, handling, storage, transportation, treatment and disposal of WEEE. Rules must be laid down to decide whether an undertaking’s processes deserve to be identified as ‘excellent’, and auditors must be trained to verify whether undertakings involved in collection and treatment meet those standards.

Objectives
The LIFE+ WEEELABEX - WEEE LABel of EXcellence - project aimed to protect the environment by improving WEEE collection and recycling practices in Europe. It specifically sought to lay down a common and harmonised set of European standards with respect to collection, handling, storage, recycling, preparation for re-use and disposal of WEEE. These standards would demonstrate compliance with EU health, safety and environmental legislation.

It planned to introduce monitoring of processing companies through audits conducted by auditors trained by the WEEELABEX Office. The aim was for all auditors to use the same audit process documents, apply the same set of standards and report their findings to the WEEELABEX Office. This could then verify which WEEE management process had successfully conformed with the standards.

The tangible result of fulfilling the WEEE Forum set of standards was to be the “WEEE label of excellence”, a symbol confirming that the parties involved in WEEE operations comply with the standards. The label would be awarded on the basis of validated, audited and standardised manuals and detailed reporting specifications. The project targeted conformity verification of around 30 companies in various countries.

Results

The WEEELABEX project has successfully developed new standards for WEEE recycling processes that are already becoming international benchmarks. It has defined the rules and trained the auditors to ensure that achievement of the required standards is effectively assessed and then communicated via the new WEEE Label of Excellence. It provides greater rigour and clarity to efforts to improve WEEE management.

The project held workshops to discuss the general principles and procedures of certification, including appropriate sanction, appeal and cancellation procedures of the WEEE Label of Excellence. This contributed to the finalisation of a complete set of guidelines providing a harmonised and coherent approach to the evaluation of any treatment installation. It included audit questions and measurement and benchmarking methods.

The project successfully developed harmonised, normative standards covering:
- General and specific technical aspects of WEEE;
- Management and reporting practices;
- Gas discharge lamps, temperature exchange equipment, CTR displays and flat panel displays; and
- Collection and transportation.

The standards are available in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Polish. A watch list of elements that future revisions of the standards should take into account has been established.

The project team elaborated an auditor profile to recruit auditors for processes in the management of WEEE appliances. It also developed a complete set of audit manuals, checklists, a training course and certification templates. The project
recruited 20 auditors who were familiar with WEEE processing technologies and who followed the training course, delivering pilot audits as part of the training process.

The beneficiary organised two audits of cooling plants with the trainee auditors. Individual audits were then carried out in different countries, with participants from the first project training often being the lead auditor in a team. The companies that meet the required standards are identified by the WEEELABEX mark and listed on the website.

The sustainability of the project’s activities is greatly enhanced by the project creating a new institution in Prague: the WEEELABEX organisation consists of a General Assembly of twenty-six producer compliance schemes, a Governing Council and the WEEELABEX Office, the organisation’s secretariat. All the producer compliance schemes that joined the WEEELABEX organisation now require any logistics, recycling or other waste management companies they work with to meet the quality standards.

Various countries have already referred to the WEEE forum standard in developing their own e-waste standard such as in the US, China, Japan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Kenya, Brazil and South Africa. A summary of the standards was recently even translated into Chinese.

Further information on the project can be found in the project's layman report(see "Read more" section).

Environmental issues addressed:

Themes

Waste - Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE)

Keywords

waste management, electrical industry, electronic material

Natura 2000 sites

Not applicable

Beneficiaries:
Coordinator: Waste of Electrical and Electronic Equipment Forum

Type of organisation: Professional organisation

Description: The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Forum is a pan-European organisation for WEEE management schemes aiming to optimise their operational efficiency, quality and environmental performance through exchange and cooperation.

Partners: None