

Address by

Mr. John Gormley, T.D.

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage
and Local Government**

at the

Launch of the Compost Quality

Standard Research Report

on

Wednesday, 27 May 2009 at 10:00 a.m.

Introduction

I am delighted to be here this morning to join with the EPA, and Percy Foster and Martin Eves from Cré, to formally launch the Compost Quality Standard. I recognise the importance and value of the quality standard which will allow us to further progress waste management policies as outlined in the National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste 2006. Equally, it will feed into a range of measures to drive economic recovery through the development of sustainable technologies and industries.

Background

The scale of the task that we face in meeting Ireland's targets for diversion of biodegradable waste under the Landfill Directive is significant. We still have a number of challenges ahead of us, and foremost among them is the need to reduce the high levels of waste currently going to landfill. However, I believe we can look forward with confidence on the basis of the progress achieved in recycling in recent years. In 1998 only 11% of biodegradable waste was recycled, by 2007, 36% of biodegradable municipal waste was being recycled.

Under the Landfill Directive, we are committed to reducing the amount of biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill by next year (2010) – literally, just around the corner. It will mean reducing, or finding alternative treatment for at least 1.4 million tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste by the end of 2010. Furthermore, the projected diversion of 1.7 million tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste for 2013 rising to 1.8 million tonnes for 2016 are not too far behind. The EPA's National Waste Report 2007 brought the scale of the challenge into sharp focus showing a continuing trend of rising waste generation and increased amounts of waste being sent to landfill. None of us can underestimate the enormous challenge that is posed by this but challenges are there to be overcome.

National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste

I believe that substantial progress can be made in a relatively short period of time. The blueprint for achieving the diversion targets has been set out in the 2006 *National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste*. The Strategy identified a wide range of integrated measures that support biodegradable waste minimisation and will enable us to progress towards the EU targets for the diversion of waste from landfill.

The Role of Composting and Segregated Collections

If composting is to form a role in meeting our targets as envisaged in the National Strategy, we must be clear about the measures that need to be put in place to support the achievement of that objective.

The first and most urgent priority to support greater levels of composting is a renewed commitment to source segregation, including the rapid roll out across the country of brown bin collections for our biodegradable waste. Source segregation, in preference to mixed waste collection, is critical to maximising the production of high quality compost. The quality of the output from compost facilities will be determined to a large extent by the quality of the segregated material taken in – greater segregation will result in reduced contamination which will be essential to support the development of market opportunities for compost.

I believe the separate collection of organic waste is required in all suitable urban and rural areas as part of an integrated collection system. In July of last year, my Department issued a circular letter to local authorities requesting that appropriate steps be taken to support an accelerated roll out of segregated collections for organic waste ('brown bins') both to domestic households and to commercial organisations.

I am encouraged by the progress achieved after one year. While 'brown bin' collections were already in place in some areas (circa 53,000 households), principally in Waterford city and county and Galway city, plans for the roll-out of brown bins are now at an advanced stage in many local authority areas, including in excess of 200,000 households in the Fingal and Dublin City Council areas.

It is also anticipated that segregated collections will be initiated in the Clare-Kerry-Limerick region and further expanded in the south east in later this year. Pilot schemes have also

been carried out in other local authority areas, including a current pilot scheme in Louth involving 10,000 households, in preparation for more widespread provision of these services.

Market Development\Quality Standards

Some of you here may have attended the launch of the first Action Plan for 2009, published by the Market Development Group's Implementation Team earlier this month, as a means of prioritising the implementation of the Market Development Programme for Waste Resources. As many of you are aware, the work of the Group has focused on the three priority waste streams of organics, papers and plastics. This Action Plan aims to provide real incentives to business to innovate within the waste sector and create employment over the course of 2009.

All of us here understand that waste can be turned into a resource. In this unpredictable economic climate we must focus more than ever on areas of economic potential and use our resources to the maximum effect instead of simply discarding them. This is why segregated collections are so important given they maximise the potential resource value of discarded items.

Quality Standards

The overall objective of this project was to collate the compost quality databases from Irish compost samples and compare them with databases and samples from other European countries to develop an Irish industry-led compost standard for source-separated biodegradable materials. The data in this report provides important information that can help us tackle environmental problems. Quality is the key and customers must be satisfied that they are getting an excellent product. In practical terms, the standard that is being launched today will provide compost users with the clarity and certainty they demand for such products.

Other Policies

Building on my commitment to recycling and sustainable practices, I am proposing some legislative changes later in the year with regard to the landfill levy and the collection and recovery of food waste arising from commercial premises.

Landfill Fees

The EPA have signalled, and industry have made this point to me directly, that falling gates fees at landfill facilities are undermining composting and other recycling operations. This is not acceptable. In the short term, I want to clearly signal that landfill is a solution of the past which can have only a minor and diminishing role in the future. I have secured Government approval to the drafting of new legislation which will provide me with greater flexibility in the setting of the landfill levy, as well as its extension to other waste facilities.

A draft statutory instrument is also under development which will require the separate collection and appropriate recovery of specified food waste arising from commercial premises. It is anticipated that the draft instrument will be subject to a public consultation in advance of its finalisation later this year.

Conclusion

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Environmental Protection Agency who funded this project under the Environmental Research, Technological Development and Innovation (ERTDI) programme and Cré who undertook the research. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Munoo Prasad, who has been instrumental in the field of compost research over the past twenty years and although recently retired is still giving sterling service to this industry through his research.

Everyone is aware of the challenges currently facing the country. Co-operation between all stakeholders remains as important as ever as we continue to make progress towards adding value to material which has previously been seen as waste. Against this background, I am confident that the launch of this standard will help us all to develop this industry's potential for future job and wealth creation and contribute towards more sustainable consumption and production practices going forward.