

# Establishment of a network of waste advisers

## In a nutshell

### Summary overview

It is BEMP to set up a network of waste advisers (also called “waste (prevention) officers”, “recycling officers”, “waste (prevention) consultants”) at local level in order to raise the awareness of the general public (residents and small businesses delivering their waste to the local MSW management system).

The use of waste advisers is especially relevant to address specific issues by targeting a specific territory or audience with a poor separate collection rate or high contamination in separately collected fractions in order to deliver an adapted answer, as waste advisers can interact face to face.

Waste advisers typically have a prior qualification in the environmental field as well as knowledge of the practices of waste minimisation, reuse and recycling, and can be volunteers, part-time or full-time staff. Waste advisers can perform a range of activities, such as:

- make residents and small businesses aware of the environmental issues related to waste generation and management;
- inform residents and small businesses about the waste collection rules and how the different fractions are treated and recycled;
- provide residents and small businesses with guidance to identify possibilities to reduce or better manage (e.g. better source separation) their waste;
- work with residents and small businesses on specific waste streams that are considered more problematic (food waste, textiles, nappies, etc.);
- carry out engagement actions targeted to specific audiences (e.g. children/teenagers, pensioners, businesses, foreign-language speakers);
- gain a better understanding of what happens on the ground (drivers, reasons, shortfalls).

### Waste management area

Cross-cutting

MSW - strategy

MSW - prevention

MSW - collection

MSW - EPR

MSW - treatment

CDW

HCW

### Applicability

This BEMP can be implemented at any level. However, their scope of action is more focused on the local level since they address operational issues (waste prevention and recycling guidelines).

### Specific environmental performance indicators

In addition to the indicators presented in the best practice "Common environmental performance indicators for municipal waste management", the most appropriate indicators to assess the successful implementation of this BEMP are:

- Share of population in the waste management catchment area advised by waste advisers over a given time period (e.g. % of population per month);
- Number of waste advisers per 100 000 residents.

### Benchmark of excellence

- A network of waste advisers is in place with at least one waste adviser per 20 000 residents.

## Description

Effective environmentally friendly management of municipal solid waste, as well as other types of waste, e.g. commercial waste, relies to a large extent on the individual choices and behaviour of citizens. Convenient waste collection infrastructure and efficient collection services are important facilitators in this process. Furthermore, in order to improve waste management performances, local authorities and waste management companies can further play a crucial role in:

- making citizens and entrepreneurs/small businesses **aware of the environmental issues** related to waste generation and management;
- **informing** them about the waste collection and treatment rules;
- **providing them with guidance** to identify possibilities to reduce or better manage their waste.

Different types of communication instruments are used by local authorities and waste companies: sorting guidelines, information letters, websites, etc. However, one of the most effective methods of communication is interactive face-to-face communication where citizens, entrepreneurs and small businesses, delivering their waste to the local waste management system, can directly engage in discussions about waste issues.

This BEMP deals with the setting up of a network of "waste advisers" (also called "waste (prevention) officers", "recycling officers", "waste (prevention) consultants") at local level in order to **raise the awareness of the general public** (citizens and entrepreneurs/small businesses delivering their waste to the local waste management system) in the field of waste management. The idea is to **target issues at source** through awareness-raising activities, instead of applying technical end-of-pipe solutions. Waste advisers can support the adoption of a correct waste hierarchy by residents (by focusing on prevention and reuse). Also, through direct interaction with them, they can achieve **more engagement and long-lasting behaviour changes**. This is therefore a continuing process that requires strategic and long-term planning.

The involvement of waste advisers is an effective way to disseminate waste management and prevention actions. They can be especially relevant to address very specific issues by targeting a specific territory or audience with a poor sorting performance or high contamination in order to deliver an adapted response.

Waste advisers can be **employees** of the local waste authority or waste management company. They can also be **volunteers** who receive some public or private funding. Employing full-time waste advisers usually implies creating a dedicated team/unit within the organisation, with an appropriate management structure and procedures to ensure good coordination with other relevant departments. Interaction with other actors and institutions outside the organisation also needs to be considered.

Waste advisers typically have a prior qualification in the environmental field as well as some degree of knowledge of the practices of waste minimisation, reuse and recycling. Depending on the exact tasks and setup of the network, project management may also be an important element of the required profile. The ability to communicate effectively and to present information in a clear, concise and straightforward manner are essential skills for waste advisers. Taking into account previous experiences and specific roles in the position, additional targeted trainings can be provided on a case-by-case basis (public speaking, improving presentation skills, use of specific analytical tools, etc.).

The activities performed by the waste advisers can be more general (raising overall environmental awareness) or targeted towards the following:

- Specific **waste management actions** such as prevention, reuse or recycling/source separation.
- Specific **waste streams** that are considered more problematic (food waste, textiles, plastic bags, nappies, etc.).
- The target can also be a specific **audience**. For instance, children and teenagers are seen as an important audience whose awareness of waste management issues needs to be particularly stimulated (because they are the future generation of citizens and can also have a big influence on others, for instance by “educating” their parents). Concrete communication actions could include open classes at schools and kindergartens, arranging educational visits to waste management facilities (composting/recycling sites), screening of educational movies, providing teaching resources to be integrated in the curriculum, etc.

Further target audiences can be businesses or public entities, for which waste advisers can provide practical advice or develop tailored waste management plans and resource-efficient strategies. Average households can also be a target audience and best reached through personal visits in their homes to help individual citizens understand how to correctly separate waste in their own home environment.

In comparison to using conventional communication activities, there are a number of elements that make the involvement of waste advisers potentially more effective, especially in the long term, such as a consistent message, the possibility to develop expertise in different topics, feedback and capacity-building among the team and transfer of the accumulated knowledge externally (i.e. waste advisers acting as enablers). Elements that can be considered best practices for having an effective network of waste advisers include the following:

- **Holistic approach:** Even if some campaigns have a specifically targeted focus, all materials and waste streams should be taken into account within a broader environmental strategy. Awareness-raising actions should be prioritised in line with the waste management hierarchy. Focus should be on prevention and reuse.
- **Cross-cutting issues:** The activities of waste advisers should not only tackle waste but should also make connections to other environmental issues (including energy, biodiversity, climate, etc.) in an effort to achieve a real and lasting change of mind-sets. The target audience’s interests should also be taken into account (for example promoting reduction of food waste to save money, promoting reuse to stimulate local employment, etc.).
- **Consistency** of the message delivered by waste advisers in the territory should be sought, making sure that it is in line with the national/regional policy framework and existing technical and logistical solutions.
- **Coordination** with other organisations with the same aim in order to find possible synergies and enhance the effect of the communication.
- **Capitalising on the knowledge** waste advisers gain through their direct contact and work with the citizens in order to boost the general communication strategy and to identify specific possibilities for improvement.

## Environmental benefits

An effective and active network of waste advisers can foster good source separation of the different waste fractions by the general public as well as waste prevention. This leads to various environmental benefits, such as higher recycling rates, improved quality of the recyclable fractions collected, reduced quantities of residual waste and optimised management of associated treatment costs.

Although directly linking communication activities with changes in behaviour and related environmental benefits is challenging, as behaviour can be affected by many different external factors, there is evidence of the positive effects of introducing a system of waste advisers. For instance, there are reports of improved separate collection after the introduction of a system of waste advisers, or of a relation between the number of waste advisers per inhabitants and the waste management performance of an area (Schleich pers. comm., 2016). This is developed in the next section.

## **Side effects**

The cross-media effects of waste advisers are considered marginal when compared to the environmental benefits resulting from their work.

These cross-media effects could include greenhouse gas emissions due to their travels, and printing of materials and creation of other material supports needed for educational purposes.

## **Applicability**

The introduction of waste advisers in a territory is a BEMP that can be implemented at any level. However, their scope of action is more focused at the local level since they address operational issues (waste prevention and recycling guidelines). No specific instrument is required to set up a network of waste advisers; the main issue is rather how to fund their operations.

National/regional subsidies or financing through PROs can contribute to the development of such networks. The latter can be on a voluntary or regulatory basis. For instance, specific legislation in some countries (e.g. Austria, France) requires that EPR schemes for household packaging contribute to finance the activities of waste advisers at local level since their tasks involve communication on packaging waste management, which falls under the responsibility of the respective scheme.

According to the experience of organisations that have successfully deployed waste advisers networks (e.g. North London and province of Styria, Austria), it is better to implement it on a larger scale – at least a region, province or big city (in both cases mentioned above a territory of more than 1 million inhabitants). This is seen as beneficial to ensure the optimisation of resources, the economic feasibility of the development and implementation of a qualification/training programme as well as the continuity of step-by-step implementation of waste advisers in all regions and municipalities. For instance, in North London in 2008 each of the seven boroughs had a recycling officer, an education officer and a waste prevention officer. Today, the resources are reduced because the councils have had to make significant budget cuts. As a result, nearly all positions have been removed and a team of only five waste prevention officers acts at the level of the NLWA instead.

On the other hand, it has to be ensured that the territory covered by the action of waste advisers shares the same objectives and sets similar priorities.

It is also important to have good collaboration between the different stakeholders involved and a good flow of information between them in order to achieve synergies and avoid inconsistencies or duplicating work.

## **Economics**

Economic data mainly includes staff costs and the production of communication material and the organisation of events. The practice of involving waste advisers also involves indirect financial benefits as a consequence of the positive effects they achieve (improvement of separate collection, better recycling, etc.) and the related decrease of costs for waste treatment and/or increased revenues from sale of materials, but no actual data on these could be obtained.

## **Austria**

In Austria, the initial funding in the first years was provided by the Federal Labour Agency (AMS), serving to finance concept and qualification measures. In the starting period until 2000, the AMS continued to provide funding for staff costs for consultants during training and employment in municipalities amounting to either 50 % of total staff costs for one year or 30 % for two years. After the AMS funding expired in 2000, the municipalities which employed waste advisers were responsible for the financing and there were limited staff cost contributions from packaging waste collection scheme(s) (amounting to around 20–30 % of total staff costs). In Styria, one of the provinces, there was a limited provincial subsidy until 2008 (amounting to 10 %) (Styria, 2014).

Currently, the financing of the staff costs comes from the overall municipal waste management budget which in Austria consists of residual waste fees from households and small enterprises (larger enterprises are fully self-responsible for their waste and are usually not covered by municipal waste management). The mandatory federal guidelines for municipal waste fee calculation also include the costs for waste advisers. Since 1993 the packaging collection scheme(s) has partly contributed to the staff costs, and in return the municipalities provide the service of also covering the communication work for prevention and collection of packaging waste which is legally the obligation of the scheme(s).

## **North London**

The team of waste officers is financed through the levy for disposal of waste, which is itself the responsibility of the NLWA. The interests are therefore aligned to reduce the generation of waste, have better separation at source and consequently reduce expenses for treatment.

## **Driving forces for implementation**

Organising a network of waste advisers is a way to improve the communication strategy of the waste authority. Waste advisers act as a friendly interface between the waste producers and the waste management systems and are generally put in place to address very specific issues, e.g. the improvement of sorting performances, the reduction of contamination in the sorted fractions, or the implementation of participative actions such as home composting. It is an interesting way to address more complex or unpopular issues or to target areas of the population that are not complying with the requirements of the waste strategy.

It can also be used to help with the implementation and the coordination of other technical or financial instruments, e.g. a new collection scheme or a PAYT system.

Moreover, developing a network of waste advisers allows the creation of jobs in the environmental sector.

## **Austria**

The concept of “municipal environment and waste advisers” was invented as an innovative solution to a number of severe waste problems Austria was facing in the 1980s, which were causing broad political discontent. The waste advisers' network was implemented within a decade, transforming the public discontent into highly motivated action and contributions of the majority of citizens to separate waste collection. Subsequently this led to political acceptance of building new waste treatment facilities and even landfills with the highest technical standards of that time. In the early years, the Federal Labour Agency (AMS) provided an important financial contribution within a broad national initiative for the creation of new and innovative jobs. This happened against the background of rapidly rising unemployment rates (also within well-qualified groups) in the 1980s and early 1990s. The funding was a long-term political commitment of the AMS within a long-term general national funding programme for the creation of new jobs (“Aktion 8000”, the “experimental labour market policy”), which facilitated funding for municipalities intending to employ waste advisers and send them on the training programme.

Between 1990 and 1993 some provincial waste laws (Styria, Salzburg, Tirol, Upper Austria) integrated obligations for municipalities or regional municipal associations to provide waste management advice for their populations. Meanwhile all provincial waste management plans as well as the federal waste management plan and integrated prevention programme contain further detailed provisions on waste management advice.

### North London - UK

The position of “waste officer” was created in 2007 and each of the seven NWLA boroughs had dedicated staff working with waste prevention. The NLWA itself had only one such employee who was working with and relying on the staff of the seven boroughs. Around 2010, because of the recession and related restructuring, many positions of officers dedicated to waste prevention were removed. At the same time, the NLWA received funding of GBP 200 000 from WRAP to run a food waste prevention campaign. It was very well received and had positive outcomes. Given the positive results achieved through optimised resources (although local budgets were increasingly tightening after the financial crisis), it was decided to build a in-house team and to continue its operations with a slightly modified role (as compared to the previous situation).

### Brussels Capital Region - Belgium

Waste management in a company is often synonymous with high costs. However, an adapted strategy within the company generally allows a decrease in the quantity of generated waste and related costs. As a consequence, this also leads to the company having a reduced environmental impact, to financial savings, to compliance with existing relevant legislation and not least to a “greener” image in the eyes of the consumers/general public. However, business managers often do not have the technical knowledge necessary to develop adequate waste management policy for their companies and therefore access to qualified advisory services can be very beneficial.

## Reference organisations

### Waste advisers with a focus on household waste and awareness-raising of citizens:

**Austria** – Styria: the province of Styria has developed a network of waste advisers since the early 1980s (Styria, 2014). It is regarded as one of the key instruments for the development of the Styrian Waste Strategy.

- The Office of the Federal State Government of Styria (Division Waste Management and Sustainability). More information available: <http://www.awv.steiermark.at/cms/ziel/27514100/DE/>
- Austrian Association of Waste Prevention (ARGE): the association developed the first training concept for municipal waste consultants. More information available: [www.arge.at/](http://www.arge.at/)
- Austrian Association of Waste Consultants (VABÖ): the association representing municipal advisers on environment and waste in Austria. All municipal waste consultants in Austria are members of VABÖ with the main aim to foster the exchange of experiences and ideas. More information available: <http://www.vaboe.at/>

### France

- Trivalis: the public authority that manages municipal waste in the department of Vendée. It manages a team of waste advisers with a specific focus on school campaigns: <http://trivalis.fr/pedagogie-scolaire/>
- Eco-Emballages and Ecofolio: French EPR schemes for packaging and graphic paper which provide financial support for waste consultants.

### Germany

- Abfallberatung: communication and information exchange platform for waste advisers in Germany: <http://www.abfallberatung.de//kommunen/kommunen.aspx>
- Nuremberg: waste advisers on a volunteering basis: <https://www.nuernberg.de/internet/abfallwirtschaft/abfallberatung.html>

## Italy

- Hera SpA (an Italian waste management company), in cooperation with some municipalities in the Emilia Romagna Region (e.g. Modena, Bologna, Ferrara), has trained and involved volunteers as waste advisers: <http://www.comune.modena.it/salastampa/archivio-comunicati-stampa/2016/8/raccolta-rifiuti-il-bilancio-dell2019attivita-di-gel-e-gev/#null>

## UK

- NLWA: North London Waste Authority: The NLWA has an extensive programme of awareness-raising activities on most aspects of waste prevention, with a particular focus on food waste, bulky waste and textiles. A team of waste prevention officers and advisers has been set up to deliver the waste prevention message through direct contact with residents: <http://www.nlwa.gov.uk/about/authority-services>
- WRAP: Waste and Resources Action Programme, "Organisation helping businesses and individuals reduce waste, develop sustainable products and use resources in an efficient way"; it provides information and guidance to help local authorities deliver waste and recycling services, notably trainings for recycling officers: <http://www.wrap.org.uk/>

## Waste advisers acting as consultants for businesses:

### Belgium – Brussels-Capital Region:

- Brussels-Environment: the environmental administration of Brussels-Capital Region has concluded a partnership with the Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry in Brussels (BECI) to support businesses in prevention and management of their waste by creating a special programme (Brussels Waste Network): <http://www.environnement.brussels/thematiques/batiment/la-gestion-de-mon-batiment/pour-vous-aider/brussels-waste-network>
- Brussels Waste Network: initiative of the Minister of Environment, Brussels-Environment and the BECI in Brussels. The aim of this programme is to inform, to develop and to encourage a network of "waste advisers" who are employed at different sectoral federations and companies: <http://www.brusselswastenetwork.eu/> and [http://document.environnement.brussels/opac\\_css/elecfile/IF\\_BrusselsWasteNetwork\\_FR](http://document.environnement.brussels/opac_css/elecfile/IF_BrusselsWasteNetwork_FR)

### Ireland:

- The Southern Waste Region: The region currently employs a Regional Industrial Waste Minimisation Officer (RIWMO) who works specifically with the business sector across the region in order to raise environmental awareness among employees and assist companies in their waste reduction programme. Environmental Awareness Officers (EAOs), based in each of the local authorities within the region, also work with the business sector in pursuit of best environmental practice, and work closely with the RIWMO. The RIWMO has set up a number of Networks and issues a newsletter two to three times per year. The region also employs a Waste Prevention Officer who has responsibility for implementing the EPA-funded Local Authority Prevention Network (LAPN) programme which works on the delivery of specific prevention initiatives. The EAOs based in each of the local authorities within the region also work with the programme. The region also funds a number of prevention and reuse programmes.

## Literature

NLWA (2016) – "North London Waste Prevention Plan: 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018". Accessed in December 2016 at <http://www.nlwa.gov.uk/docs/2016/north-london-waste-authority-waste-prevention-plan-2016-18.pdf> Last access September 2017.

Styria – Good practice Styria (2014): Municipal Waste Consultancy. Factsheet of the Regions for Recycling project available at [http://www.regions4recycling.eu/upload/public/Good-Practices/GP\\_Styria\\_waste-consultancy.pdf](http://www.regions4recycling.eu/upload/public/Good-Practices/GP_Styria_waste-consultancy.pdf) Last access

September 2017.

Schleich Berthold, Austrian Association for Waste Prevention – personal communication on 8-11-2016.