

Extra investment needed to bring more cans into EU's official recycling loop, study finds

23 September 2016 - According to a study by BOKU University, Europe can take specific measures to formalise the informal recycling of aluminium beverage cans. The findings were presented today at European Aluminium's 2016 Packaging Seminar in Mallorca.

The study was carried out by the Vienna-based Institute of Waste Management at BOKU University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences. Considerable amounts of used beverage cans are collected by waste-pickers, particularly in South-Eastern European countries like Romania, Greece and Hungary. The study estimates that each individual informal collector amasses an average of 1.6 kg of used beverage cans per day.

Mr Raphael Thevenin, Chair of European Aluminium's Packaging Group said, *"Formally counting cans that are already collected informally is an easy way to boost official recycling rates. Not only that, but it will more accurately reflect the true recycling practices of each country."*

One tried and true method is the widespread installation of Voluntary Take-Back Machines. By placing close to 200 machines in strategic locations such as supermarkets, in just five years the Hungarian Returpack system captured 15-20% of the country's total market for used beverage cans, representing 58% of all informally collected cans. Similar machines were recently installed in Romania. Collection machines ensure fair payment in exchange for the raw material. They also have the added benefit of inciting behaviour change by involving consumers in the act of recycling.

However, these machines alone cannot fix the problem. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) collection schemes continue to play an important role in formalising the informal. EPR schemes are particularly effective when suited to the unique needs of the countries where they operate. According to the study, existing schemes can nevertheless be improved: better designed bins can help combat the theft of valuable aluminium packaging scrap.

To boost the formal collection of beverage cans, the aluminium industry can also partner with recognised scrap dealers, provided that they respect scrap prices and conduct business transparently with local collectors. A major hurdle to the collection of scrap is the strict ID control of individual collectors who simply wish to earn a small income. The study found that relaxing administrative requirements would encourage local waste-pickers to bring back a few cans on a voluntary basis.

"The European aluminium industry is committed to recycling. As a permanent material, aluminium is a key contributor to the circular economy. But as this study shows, additional investment and effort is needed to ensure valuable scrap like aluminium beverage cans stay in the official recycling loop," said Mr Thevenin.

The study was conducted in view of the recycling targets for aluminium packaging proposed in the European Commission's Circular Economy package. Recycling rates for aluminium beverage cans in Europe are already above 70%, but the industry is ambitious. While the EU is discussing a target of 75% by 2025, European Aluminium's members are aiming to reach 80% by 2020.

Read a summary of the study [here](#). For the full study, contact Maarten G. Labberton (labberton@european-aluminium.eu).

About European Aluminium:

European Aluminium, founded in 1981, is the association that represents the whole value chain of the aluminium industry in Europe. We actively engage with decision-makers and the wider stakeholder community to promote the outstanding properties of aluminium, secure growth and optimise the contribution our metal can make to meeting Europe's sustainability challenges. Through environmental and technical expertise, economic and statistical analysis, scientific research, education and sharing of best practices, public affairs and communication activities, European Aluminium promotes the use of aluminium as a permanent material that is part of the solution to achieving sustainable goals, while maintaining and improving the image of the industry, of the material and of its applications among their stakeholders.