

5th European Gypsum Recyclers Forum 26 May 2021

Conclusions and recommendations to encourage circularity in the gypsum chain and in construction

*Eurogypsum organised the **5th European Gypsum Recyclers Forum** on 26 May 2021 in the form of an online webinar, including presentations by institution and industry representatives and a moderated discussion on circularity in construction and the way towards increased recycling of gypsum.*

More than 70 participants attended the webinar, which was moderated by Chris Davies (Rud Pedersen Public Affairs). A recorded video and the dissemination of the webinar's materials (available [here](#)) will also allow a broader audience.

I. Gypsum recycling: Key messages from the Forum

Promoting gypsum recycling is not only an important commitment to sustainability and to achieving Europe's environmental policy objectives for a circular economy. It is also **a necessity to secure a stable supply of raw materials** for the gypsum processing industry, in the context of a phase-out of gypsum from flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) of coal power plants over the coming decades, as well as a strict legal framework on the access to mineral resources. While the expected volumes of recycled gypsum will not offset the amounts of FGD gypsum in a foreseeable future, they can clearly contribute at least partially to this objective.

The latest figures collected by the plasterboard manufacturing sector show the use of around **600,000 tonnes of recycled gypsum** in the production of new plasterboard in 2019. Numbers are progressing over the years, although at a low pace. Further efforts are needed to overcome the barriers to actual recycling.

Cost and regulatory aspects are high on the list of obstacles generally perceived by market actors as hindering higher recycling rates. The price of purchasing recycled gypsum is often not competitive with alternative sources of gypsum, whether quarried minerals or FGD material. Furthermore, the differences across national rules or in the enforcement of the EU Landfill Directive result in loopholes in the restricted disposal of recyclable waste such as gypsum waste, making it more economical to dispose the waste in countries with more relaxed rules, rather than recycling it.

The possible presence of **dangerous substances** such as asbestos fibres in building demolition waste remains a deterrent to actual recycling in several EU Member States. Sorting and recycling professionals have taken effective measures to avoid, detect and remove any such possible content. However, legal certainty – in the form of an agreed threshold or detection limit – would help to increase customer confidence and boost the demand for recycled content.

While legal or regulatory measures are needed to improve the framework conditions, market actors agree that **a profitable business case** is a prerequisite to a substantial increase of gypsum recycling. Structural price evolutions of alternative sources of gypsum will certainly play a part in making recycled gypsum more competitive. However, technological developments, improvements to waste sorting, as well as a better knowledge of the waste volume flows, will also be positive factors.

Operators across the whole gypsum recycling and processing chain agree that a **closed-loop model should always be preferred when possible**, by which waste from plasterboard or plaster products is recycled into new plasterboard or other plaster products. Other products where recycled gypsum can supplement or replace natural raw materials can also be taken into account, provided that these products, at the end of their own life, are able to be transformed into valuable materials, to replace in a close loop the virgin non-renewable materials.

II. The gypsum sector's call to boost circularity in construction

Based on the discussions held at the 5th European Gypsum Recyclers Forum, Eurogypsum is calling upon EU and national policymakers, as well as gypsum recycling and processing operators, to consider the following recommendations in order to increase the actual recycling of gypsum and promote circularity in the construction ecosystem:

- **Promote demand for recycled content:** Policies aimed at encouraging market demand for recycled construction materials should be prioritised. We welcome the launch of the EU Renovation Wave and support Green Public Procurement or other initiatives which can accelerate the uptake of products manufactured with recycled content. The use of non-regulatory tools, such as labels or certificates, can also support this objective.
- **Facilitate a larger market offer for recycled content:** Regulatory measures such as a possible EU End of Waste status, the revision of the EU's waste targets – possibly with material-specific targets, legal certainty on the possible presence of hazardous substances in demolition waste, and the inclusion of recycled content declaration through a revised Construction Products Regulation, would incentivise market actors into recycling.

- **Support transformational changes in the construction ecosystem:** The Level(s) programme, EU circular economy principles for buildings, the EU Construction and Demolition Waste Protocol are useful initiatives to promote and accompany our sector's transition into more circular models. Such initiatives should be disseminated throughout Europe's building environment, and continued in the future.
- **Avoid non-circular options:** EU and national rules on waste disposal and landfill should be properly enforced, to avoid cross-border "waste evasion". The right price signals should be available to disincentivise the disposal of valuable waste. Further restrictions to disposal, including bans, may also be considered.