

**DRAFT**

**Address**

**by**

**Mr. Batt O’Keeffe, T.D.,  
Minister of State at the Environment, Heritage  
and Local Government**

**at the**

**Repak Annual Conference**

**for**

**Local Authorities and Waste Contractors**

**in the**

**Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore,  
County Offaly**

**on**

**Wednesday, 25 May 2005**

**at**

**10:00 a.m.**

Waste management is one of the most significant and complex environmental challenges now facing us. Waste generation by all sectors continues to increase - reflecting economic growth and increasing consumption – and this is something that must be reversed. Industry – i.e. producers – can make a primary contribution in this regard by, in the first instance, incorporating environmental considerations in the design of products and associated packaging.

In tandem with waste prevention and minimisation objectives, we must also strive to deal with that waste which is generated in an environmentally sound manner. To paraphrase the much-used slogan in our '*Race against Waste*' campaign – “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” must become the mantra of standard practice in both the household and commercial sectors, thereby assisting in the important task of diverting our waste from landfill.

Success in meeting these twin objectives will be measured by how we - as a society - meet this challenge, acting collectively and implementing practical, yet innovative, cost-effective measures to tackle our waste

problems. Dealing with waste is seldom easy, but it is our problem and working together we have to solve it.

There is an old adage – “*coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success”*. This is particularly apt in relation to packaging waste where Repak, it’s members, local authorities and waste recovery operators have all been instrumental in moving things forward and increasing recycling rates. Not forgetting the role of Government and my Department in setting the policy and legislative framework in the area of waste generally, or the responses of the general public and the business sector to promotional urgings and new regulatory requirements.

Truly, a multiple of players and stakeholder groups have contributed positively to the progress made in increasing packaging waste recycling rates, clearly demonstrating that when a true partnership approach is adopted we can be successful in achieving our environmental goals.

Contrary to perceptions there might be following the recent European Court of Justice judgement against Ireland in relation to waste, which

incidentally related to past – i.e. pre 2000 - poor waste management practices, we have made major strides in a few short years. Real and tangible progress has been achieved, but perhaps none more so than in the area of packaging waste which - being governed by a dedicated EU Directive - is officially one of our priority waste streams.

Meeting the EU packaging waste recovery target of 25% for 2001 – against considerable odds - was a landmark achievement. Implementation of the regional waste management plans, resulting in –

- the expansion of the bring bank and recycling centre networks;
- the roll-out of segregated green bin household collection of recyclables; and
- the commencement of pay by weight/use household waste charging earlier this year,

combined with the introduction of mandatory obligations under the 2003 Packaging Regulations on producers to segregate their own ‘back-door’ commercial packaging waste for recycling, have had the effect of further accelerating packaging waste recycling rates in the interim.

To put this progress in context, the Environmental Protection Agency in its *National Waste Database Interim Report for 2003*, published last December, indicated that some 420,000 tonnes of packaging waste was recycled in 2003, representing a recycling rate of 44% - up from 27% in 2001, and 14% in 1998. The indications are of further progress since then and that we are on course to meet our EU end 2005 50% packaging waste recycling target. Frankly, quite remarkable progress over a relatively short period of time and a credit to all concerned.

So we have successfully started the journey in relation to packaging waste. However, we must also recognise that the road we have to travel is a long one with many more challenges still to be met.

Only last year, the 1994 EU Packaging Directive was amended, setting even more challenging packaging waste recovery and recycling targets to be achieved by Ireland in 2011. It is important therefore that all stakeholder groups – including those groups represented in today's audience, and not forgetting Repak and its members - maintain their efforts in our collective quest to meet the ever higher EU targets.

With a view to facilitating continued progress on packaging waste, a National Strategy Group on Packaging Waste Recycling – co-chaired by my Department and Repak, and comprising representation from relevant public and private sector stakeholder groupings - was established in October 2004 charged with developing an effective six-year programme to ensure that Ireland will meet the challenging 2011 recovery and recycling targets. Already the Strategy Group deliberations have resulted in amending Packaging Regulations made in December 2004. I would be anxious that whatever further regulatory changes are considered necessary by the Strategy Group – and I understand that further changes are being contemplated - would be put in place as quickly as possible.

Effective enforcement of the regulatory obligations on producers under the Packaging Regulations is critical to the success of this entire process. Enforcement is not only important from an environmental perspective, but also because of the need to ensure that companies which are fulfilling their statutory obligations do not find themselves being undermined by competitors operating outside the law.

I am aware that the stepped-up enforcement efforts of the local authorities over the last two years – co-ordinated initially by my Department and more recently by the Office of Environmental Enforcement in the EPA – have resulted in significantly increased compliance with the Packaging Regulations in the commercial sector. I am also aware that these efforts have resulted in a significant increase in Repak membership numbers. However, it is imperative that local authorities - as the designated enforcement authorities under the Regulations - maintain their efforts in ensuring compliance across the board so that all packaging producers are fulfilling their statutory obligations and that a level playing field exists for one and all.

Finally, I would like to thank Repak for the active role it has played in promoting packaging waste recycling in recent years. With the continued effort, commitment and good will of all stakeholder groups - and maintaining the stakeholder partnership approach which has brought success thus far - I am confident that we can meet our challenging EU packaging waste recovery and recycling targets in the

years ahead, thereby continuing to 'turn the tide' in the important  
*'Race against Waste'*.