

Assessing the informal recycling of aluminium beverage cans in Athens (Greece)

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Abstract

In EU27 approximately 68% of all aluminium beverage cans was recycled in 2011, amounting to more than 25 billion cans. Greece is a large aluminium producer, with a wide production of aluminium goods and the high metal value is considered to lead to high recycling rates. However, traced aluminium packaging recycling, realised via the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system of the Hellenic Recovery and Recycling Organisation (HERRCO) or through large byers reporting to it, amounts to a recycling rate of less than 10%. It is widely understood that this low achievement of aluminium recycling by the formal sector does not reflect the actual recycling of this highly priced metal, as the informal sector plays a crucial role in the total recycling in Greece, as is also the case in many other countries.

The objective of this work was to estimate the contribution of the informal sector in aluminium beverage cans recycling in Athens, to depict the aluminium material flow in the informal recycling chain and to discover the final destination of the recycled aluminium packaging.

The research took place in several areas of Athens during the summer of 2015, using a structured questionnaire to collect information through interviews with waste pickers. In total, 60 street pickers fully responded to the interview. Results provide socio-demographic data (regarding the origin and work of the street pickers) and quantitative information regarding the amount of collected recyclable materials and the price of sale for each recyclable material.

Some of the main findings are: (1) street pickers work on average 7 hours per day, 6 days per week; (2) on average, street pickers in Athens collect 1.1 kg of aluminium beverage cans per day; (3) the price for this material in the scrap yards varies in the range of 0.6-0.8 €/kg; and (4) the average income of a street picker is 16.05 €/day from all the recyclables s/he collects).

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