

Study visit to Belgium

Belgium is a small highly populated country with just over 10.3 million inhabitants. The country is broken into three regions, Flanders, Walloon and Brussels with Flemish and French being the primary languages. Belgium was selected for a trial visit, due its similarities with Ireland waste management system. There is one compliance scheme that covers all of Belgium called Recupel. Recupel, a not-for-profit organisation, was setup by producers and manufactures to organise a system for collecting and treating of WEEE. Belgium had introduced reuse and recycling policy before the WEEE directive (VLAREA decree). Reuse mind sets appear to be quite different in Belgium compared to Ireland, with a widespread culture of purchasing second hand items in the « brocantes » (flea markets). Belgium also has other initiatives to exploit the reuse sector economically and socially.

Our visitation was carried out in Flanders, northern Belgium. There is a population of 6 millions. Recupel provides compliance to all register producers. Reuse is carried out by social enterprises separate to Recupel.

The Recycle Center Hageland, formally known as “Kringloopcentrum Hageland” is a network of refurbishers. They have developed their own operating standards and maintain these standards throughout all there refurbishing premises and outlets. WEEE categories are broken down into 5 area’s for testing: (1) Fridges and freezers (2) TV and monitors (3) Washing machines and dryers (4) Ovens and cookers (5) Small appliances. Each category has their own unique refurbishment area, catered to the specialized tests that are run. Each part of the refurbishment process is documented and uploaded to server, which can be accessed by the entire Recycle Center Hageland network. Currently there are 10 large refurbishment premises which deal with refurbishment of all goods including WEEE. There are 31 reuse centers in Flanders, which collected and transported WEEE to the larger more equipment refurbishment premises. An outlet network, kingerwingel, has also being established for selling refurbished stock (this includes electrical and non electrical products). There are currently 103 outlet stores under the kingerwingel label. The Recycle Center Hageland started in 1996 with 8,000 customers and in 2008 they currently have over 100,000 buyers. Kingerwingel employ 3300 employees of which 300 are dedicated to the refurbishment of WEEE. The Recycle Center Hageland, invests in sustainable jobs for people who elsewhere in the labor market have little or no opportunities.

The Recycle Center Hageland networks have developed their own quality label, Revisie, which is attached to WEEE refurbished by The Recycle Center Hageland network. The Revisie label is developed to show customers , that (1) Revisie label is a mark of quality(2) label given after stringent testing (3) Revisie label appliances have a warranty of 6 months.