

Press release

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Launch of “Germany 2049: Transition to a sustainable use of raw materials” project

Energy transition, rising consumption, new infrastructures: the demand for raw materials such as building and industrial materials as well as ore and metals is not only high in Germany, it is also increasing globally as a result of the growth of newly industrialised and developing countries. At the same time, the production of many raw materials often involves serious negative impacts, socially and environmentally, at home and – above all – abroad. Although the German government’s sustainability strategy foresees raw material productivity doubling by 2020, there are no long-term policy targets or specific measures for how these future challenges are to be met. Against this background, Oeko-Institut is launching a new project – “Germany 2049 – On the path to sustainable raw materials management” – which will develop a comprehensive strategy for sustainable raw materials management in the long term using the example of the industrial society of Germany.

“Modern Germany will be celebrating its 100th birthday in 2049; by that time, the phase-out of nuclear power and the energy transition will hopefully be well advanced. But there is still not a good overall concept for raw materials policy in the decades ahead,” says Dr. Matthias Buchert, Head of the Infrastructures & Enterprises Division and project leader at Oeko-Institut. “Oeko-Institut therefore wants to develop, and present for discussion, a concrete scenario for the transition to a sustainable use of raw materials. This scenario will demonstrate how the consumption of raw materials can develop up to 2049 and what policy instruments and measures are necessary to bring about the transition to sustainable use for the long term.”

Raw materials and sustainability

Abiotic materials – from pyrites to platinum, from potassium salt to phosphor – are found in almost all consumer and economic goods today. Many uses of these materials are pillars of energy transition – e.g. motors for wind turbines and electric vehicles – and require certain metals for which there are already supply risks today.

“A major challenge is developing a sustainable strategy for the supply of raw materials while keeping an eye on their fair and sustainable production,” adds Buchert. “In our research project we want, therefore, to set targets for management of the most important raw materials. The project also aims to provide specific recommendations for action, which can serve as a basis for the policy of the German government and for EU regulation beyond 2020.”

Defining the political framework conditions

Up to now, only rudimentary political targets and measures have been set, both nationally and on EU level. These range from legislative provisions that implement waste management to improving the energy efficiency of products. At the same time, there are many support instruments which run contrary to environmental protection and sustainability. For example, Germany’s land

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transfer tax promotes building on green pastures, which is resource-intensive, instead of building in existing settlements, which conserves raw materials and space.

Oeko-Institut has already shown in many projects that the energy sector, the residential sector and waste management can be made sustainable, as can the production, collection and recycling of technology metals like rare earths. Now an overall strategy shall be developed for raw materials policy, which is being discussed in expert workshops with representatives from politics and industry and members of civil society.

Further information on Oeko-Institut's projects on raw materials and resources is available at: www.ressourcenfieber.de

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Oeko-Institut is a leading independent European research and consultancy institute working for a sustainable future. Founded in 1977, the institute develops principles and strategies for ways in which the vision of sustainable development can be realised globally, nationally and locally. It has offices in three cities in Germany: Freiburg, Darmstadt and Berlin.

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