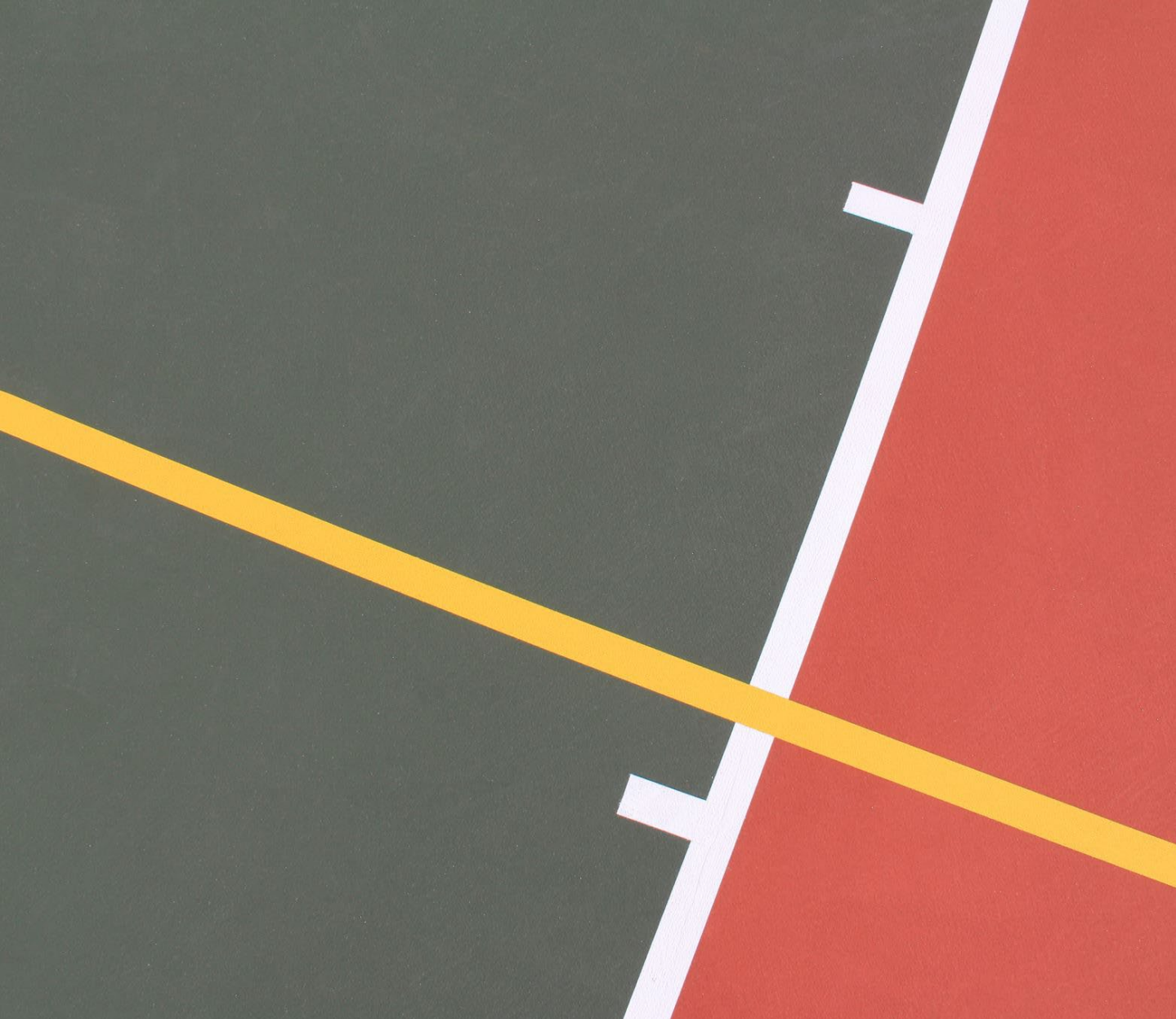




Europe fosters circular economy by legislation, policy objectives, and standards

Belgian mirror committee “Circular economy and sustainability for textile and plastics”.

Europe fosters circular economy by legislation, policy objectives, and standards

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In the [European green deal](#), the European Commission adopted a set of proposals to make the EU's climate, energy, transport and taxation policies fit for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

In addition, the EU introduced a [circular economy action plan](#), addressing those sectors that are big users of resources and where the potential for circularity is high, including the sectors that are most important to our readers: packaging, plastics and textiles.

The [EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change](#) sets the pathway to prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change in Europe. The Commission clearly states that they intend to *"increase cooperation with standardization organisations to make sure that existing standards are climate-proof and to develop new ones for climate adaptation solutions"*.

By the end of 2020 a new technical committee [CEN/TC 467](#) 'Climate Change' was established with the objective to develop European standards in support of the EU policy objectives. This clearly indicates the importance of climate change in the European standardization.

Standards support European policy and legislation

A standard is a formal, voluntary document that sets the specifications for a product, a system, a process or a service. Standards are useful to

- make different parts of an infrastructure work together or to systemize processes, e.g., energy efficiency or waste reduction.
- lift barriers to the uptake of environmentally friendly technologies and materials, by specifying tests, or provide robust definitions that avoid misleading environmental claims.
- enable the development of sustainable finance integrating the materiality of technical requirements with due diligence and underwriting procedures of financial institutions and the disclosure of financial/nonfinancial requirements.

European standards are identical in all 34 Members of CEN and CENELEC and thus create an easy access to the European market. They can also have an impact at global level if they become international standards at ISO or IEC level or are adopted in countries outside Europe. They are flexible tools that can improve safety, performances, and climate resilience, protect consumers, workers, and the environment. In some areas European legislation sets the general requirements and harmonized European Standards provide the technical details on how to meet these requirements.

Standards have the potential to support a wealth of policy initiatives related to many sectors ranging from climate mitigation and circular economy, to biodiversity preservation and a toxic-free environment.

In order to achieve EU's objectives of decarbonization and circular economy, the way we design and develop products, processes and services will need to be re-thought. Similarly, the content of standards might need to be adapted and further developed to support this endeavor.

TEXTILES

Standards can help make textile products circular, durable and produced in a sustainable way, without hazardous chemicals. For instance, standards can be developed for circular design, methods to determine recycled content, high-quality textile-to-textile recycling and labelling on durability and recyclability. The EC is encouraged to issue standardisation requests to CEN and CENELEC after the publication of the dedicated EC action plan.

In the framework of adapting its policy the EC has started different strategies including the EU strategy for sustainable textiles: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12822-EU-strategy-for-sustainable-textiles_en; the commission is expected to adopt the new policy during the first quarter of 2022.

PLASTICS

A major milestone in the Plastics Strategy is the revision of the essential requirements for packaging. ISO/TC 61 'Plastics' and CEN/TC 249 at CEN level are responsible for the standards in this area. There is a lot more potential for standards to facilitate reuse systems through common formats and typing. Reliable standards are needed to verify biodegradability claims. Furthermore, standards are crucial when it comes to harmonized data collection and analytical methods to assess microplastics from various sources, including tyres (CEN/TC 366 'Materials obtained from End-of-Life Tyres'), plastic pellet loss, and synthetic fiber wear-off. At end of life, there are many standards that ensure the quality of recycling.

The European Plastics Strategy therefore explicitly refers to European quality standards to increase confidence that recycled plastics meet manufacturer needs.

There are also standards to calculate recycling rates (EN 13440) and plastics recycling traceability (EN 15343). Future work could include the development of a reliable standard to determine recycled content in a scientifically sound way and which will cover mechanically as well as chemically recycled plastics. Recently a standard has been developed for closed-loop recycling of un-plasticized PVC for windows and doors.

Circular Plastics Alliance:

In 2019, the [circular plastics alliance \(CPA\)](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/strategy/industrial-alliances/circular-plastics-alliance/commitments-and-deliverables-circular-plastics-alliance_en) was established, an alliance committed to

- Design-for-recycling of plastic products
- A path to 10 million tonnes of recycled plastics
- A European monitoring system (see schematic on website)

https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/strategy/industrial-alliances/circular-plastics-alliance/commitments-and-deliverables-circular-plastics-alliance_en



The CPA established a monitoring system to track progress towards 10 million tonnes of recycled plastics produced and used in Europe by 2025. This is the first-ever EU-wide monitoring system on recycled plastics. As per the CPA declaration, this system is transparent and trusted, with auditing and traceability of both the system and data.

Together with the EC and CEN-CENELEC, CPA has prepared a **draft standardisation request** (mandate), which is expected to be finalized by the second half of 2022. The standardization request asks CEN and CENELEC to revise existing standardization deliverables and to prepare new ones to meet the goals of the CPA and the circular economy action plan.

Consult [the draft text](#)

The standardization request will be taken up by CEN TC249 Plastics and other product TC's, including CEN TC134 concerning resilient floor coverings (WG7).

Other important legislative & standard initiatives for the textile and plastic industry

BIO-BASED PRODUCTS

For bio-based products a set of standards have been developed that address the sustainability (biomass used, production and end-use), the life-cycle analysis of the products as well as the amount of non-mineral components used (CEN/TC 411 'Biobased products'). A new committee has initiated work to test regulated chemicals in products intended for consumers (CEN/TC 462 'Regulated chemicals in products').

ZERO POLLUTION

Towards a zero-pollution ambition for a toxic free environment: "Zero pollution" covers production, use, and end-of-life of products. Many standards exist, or are under development, with respect to all three life-cycle phases, covering a wide variety of product groups. Standards play an important role to identify, eliminate or minimize the use of (potentially) harmful chemical substances in (consumer) products, such as flame retardants and endocrine disruptors, with a view to protect human health and the environment. Standards will have to ensure the development of strict requirements on problematic substances in product standards, including the safe and sustainable use of nanomaterials. It will take years, if not decades, for legacy chemicals to be completely phased out from plastic products that were placed on the market in the past.

RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

[The EU waste & recycling policy](#) aims to contribute to the circular economy by extracting high-quality resources from waste as much as possible. The European Green Deal aims to promote growth by transitioning to a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy. As part of this transition, several EU waste laws will be reviewed.

The [Waste Framework Directive](#) is the EU's legal framework for treating and managing waste in the EU. It introduces an order of preference for waste management called the "waste hierarchy". Certain categories of waste require specific approaches. Therefore, as well as the overarching legal framework, the EU has many laws to address different types of waste.

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION OF GOODS – PROMOTING REPAIR AND REUSE

The [sustainable consumption of goods initiative](#) promotes a more sustainable use of goods throughout their useful life. It will encourage consumers to make more sustainable choices by providing incentives and tools to use goods for a longer time, including by repairing defective goods.

It will also:

- encourage producers to design goods that last longer and are easily repairable
- help reduce unsustainable consumption and its negative impact on the global environment and climate
- help build a circular economy.

European citizens are invited to share their ideas through the public consultation - call for evidence – that is open until April 5, 2022!

SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS INITIATIVE

This [sustainable products initiative](#), which will revise the Ecodesign Directive and propose additional legislative measures as appropriate, aims to make products placed on the EU market more sustainable.

Consumers, the environment and the climate will benefit from products that are more durable, reusable, repairable, recyclable, and energy-efficient. The initiative will also address the presence of harmful chemicals in products such as:

- electronics & ICT equipment
- textiles
- furniture
- steel, cement & chemicals.

The Centexbel experts follow up these legislative developments as well as the activities of CEN (and CENELEC) technical committees and working groups.

If you wish to be kept informed of the latest developments, contact [Karin Eufinger](#) to join the Belgian mirror committee "Circular economy and sustainability for textile and plastics".