

The problem of waste is worldwide – 100 billion tons of materials are consumed annually

The report of the think tank Circular Economy, presented earlier this year at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos, shows that, on average, every person on Earth consumes more than 13 tons of material a year.

Since 1970, the amount of materials consumed by the global economy has quadrupled and has grown far faster than the population that has doubled in that period. In the last two years, the British Guardian reported, consumption increased by more than 8%, while the reuse of resources decreased from 9.1 to 8.6%.

The amount of materials that humanity consumes exceeds 100 billion tons per year, and the share of recycling is declining, showed a report whose authors warn that treating the world's resources as if they are unlimited leads to a global catastrophe. As it is stated, unsustainable consumption of fossil fuels, metals, construction materials and trees is a danger to the climate and the living world.

At the same time, it is pointed out that some countries are advancing towards a circular economy in which renewable energy supports systems in which waste and pollution are reduced to zero.

"We are in danger of a global catastrophe if we continue to consume the world's resources as if they were unlimited," warned the first man of the Circular Economy, Harald Friedl.

"Governments must urgently adopt solutions for the circular economy if we are to achieve a high quality of life for nearly ten billion people by the middle of the century without destabilizing key processes on the planet," he added.

Leading author of the research, Mark de Wit, says: "We are still encouraging population and wealth growth by extracting materials. This cannot last forever – our hunger for raw materials must be stopped."

According to the report, in 2017, the last year for which data are available, 100.6 billion tons of materials were consumed worldwide. Half of that amount is sand, clay, gravel and cement used in construction, along with minerals that are extracted for the production of fertilizers. Coal, oil and gas make up 15% and metal ore 10%. The last 25% are plants and trees used for food and fuel.

The lion's share of materials – 40%, ended up in the housing sector. Other leading consumption categories include food, transportation, health, communications and consumer goods, such as clothing and furniture.

Almost a third of the material consumed annually remains in use even after a year, such as those used for buildings and vehicles. However, 15% is emitted into the atmosphere in the form of heating gases and almost a quarter is disposed of in nature, such as plastic in rivers and oceans. One third of the material is treated as waste and mostly ends up in landfills and

mine pits. Only 8.6% is recycled, the report said.

“The report is a warning to all governments,” said Chilean Environment Minister Carolina Schmidt, adding that all policies should be aimed at transforming the circular economy.

“The circular economy provides an opportunity to reduce our impact, protect ecosystems and live in harmony with the planet’s resources,” said Christiana Kloe of the WWF conservation group.

The report points out that increasing recycling can make economies more competitive, improve living standards and help meet emissions targets and avoid deforestation. It is also stated that 13 European countries have adopted road maps towards the circular economy, including France, Germany and Spain, and that Colombia became the first Latin American country to launch such a policy in 2019, reports the Guardian.

China’s ban on waste imports aims to encourage domestic recycling but has also stimulated the development of circular economy strategies in Australia and other countries that have previously exported their waste to China, the report said.

Former EU Commissioner for the Environment and co-chair of the international panel for raw materials of the UN Environment Program, Janez Potocnik, said that the world must learn to work more with less and replace ownership with sharing, which is increasingly happening with cars.

Source: euractiv.rs