

“Our system is safeguarded for a year.”

Paul Brändli is proud of the reduction in the advance recycling fee (ARF). The Managing Director of SWICO Recycling takes stock, and calls on consumers to take more responsibility.



“The 15% reduction is a conservative calculation. A further cut may be possible in future.”

Paul Brändli, what issues particularly concerned you in 2010?

The 15% reduction in the ARF. For the first time, the safety fund topped CHF 30 million, enough to maintain the recycling system for 12 months without a single franc of income.

How has that been achieved?

Partly thanks to the indexation model we introduced for recyclers and the price increase of commodities, but also due to process efficiencies such as putting logistics services out to tender, which led to a 10% reduction in transport costs. We’re also looking at ways

of improving efficiency at collection points and in the basket analysis.

Has SWICO Recycling earned too much in the past?

It’s not a question of earnings, because ours is not a profit-oriented system. Any savings we make are returned to consumers, who end up paying less – up to CHF 2 less per piece of equipment from 1 January 2011. The reason we have built up a safety fund is that we’re talking about an advance fee. We receive the money today and dispose of the equipment at the end of its life cycle. And it

can be in use for up to seven years. Theoretically, we ought to be covering the system for the whole of that period, but we have settled on one year because we have enough assets and investments. The average reduction of 15% is a conservative calculation. A further cut may be possible in future.

Who benefits from the cut in the tariff?

The price of the product you buy is a given, and the ARF is something on top, like VAT. If we reduce the ARF, the overall price drops, because importers and traders pass on the ARF cut.

Will SWICO Recycling be reducing its services by 15% too?

Absolutely not. The logistics services tender was also geared to the level of service we offer now. The same applies to the recyclers: if the price of copper rises, the recyclers receive more money for material containing copper; in other words we pay them less for the work they do. If they get less for the copper, they get more from us. That’s how the indexation model works.

How do SWICO Recycling’s fees compare with those in other countries?

The WEEE Forum, in which SWICO Recycling plays a major role, has key figures on this: what does disposal cost here, what does it cost abroad? We also have different legislation. SWICO Recycling is slightly above the average, but there are reasons for the difference.

Were there any setbacks in 2010?

I'm concerned about corporate social responsibility (CSR). In my book, CSR also stands for consumer social responsibility. Consumers dispose of their used appliances for a couple of francs and don't give a thought to where they will end up – India or Africa, for example, where four or five items are combined to make a single new one, and the rest is left in the scrap yard. People melt the last metals in a pan that they use to cook the vegetables for their dinner – and become ill. That is simply unacceptable. I believe that consumers also bear part of the responsibility and need to think where their old appliance is going before they give it away.

What is SWICO Recycling doing about it?

We're organising a Greenforum on this topic in 2011. And we are calling on all consumers to take responsibility for the environment. Journalists should be taking up the issue too. The Federal Office for the Environment grants the export licences. The question is, what is a second-hand appliance? What is one that can no longer be used? It's a difficult distinction to make.

In the 2009 Activity Report, the dissolution of regions and the indexation model were held up as the way of the future. Has that been reflected in reality?

The recyclers wanted us to abolish the regions so that they could provide customers with a complete offering. Now they can not only collect electrical appliances but also take waste paper and coffee capsules from anywhere in Switzerland. That is only possible because we have dissolved the regions and opened up the market. It's working very well. And the liberalisation also makes economic and ecological sense because it means that all kinds of goods can be transported at the same time.

In this year's report Professor Braungart talks about the future of recycling. What is SWICO Recycling's vision?

In February 2011 we are bringing firms from around the globe together at Recycling 2015/2020 to discuss how they think the recycling system should look. That will reveal where the problems lie. For me the key issue is scarcity of resources, which is being reflected in higher prices, e.g. for critical metals. That is one side of the question. The other is the approach put forward by Professor Braungart. He says that design itself needs to change. Overstating the case slightly: I put my old laptop into the oven, and it comes out as a quiche. SWICO Recycling can't influence that directly because we are at the end of the chain, where the disposal takes place. But we can emphasise what is important for us in waste disposal. For instance, that a flat-screen monitor doesn't have 80 screws that have to be got rid of. That there are declarations of materials, a minimum of harmful substances, and inert substances instead. Those are also questions of design. And that's where I see a potential sticking point: Switzerland – its politicians included

“I see myself as a mediator between business and sustainability. Both are necessary. Extreme demands and positions won't get us anywhere.”

– aims to be a pioneer, but it has only 0.8% of the global market. If we put pressure on producers they lose interest in us. Anyway, the international meeting takes place in February, and the ideas that come out of it will determine where we are in 2015.

What do you see as SWICO Recycling's role, and yours?

I see myself as a mediator between business and sustainability. Both are necessary. Extreme demands and positions won't get us anywhere.

Will SWICO Recycling still be needed 10 years from now?

That's what we'll be discussing at Recycling 2015/2020. We need to know how our key players see things and what they want. They are operating in the raw materials market, and they dictate the issues.

What projects will SWICO Recycling be involved in during 2011?

Recycling 2015/2020 is very important. So are mobile phones: the 18% return proportion is still some way short of our target of 30%. That's why we launched a competition for schools linked to the teaching folder we produced. Another major item on the agenda is the revision of the VREG. The decision at issue is whether to let the voluntary systems continue as they are, or introduce an element of compulsion.