



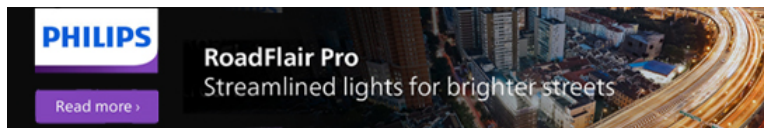
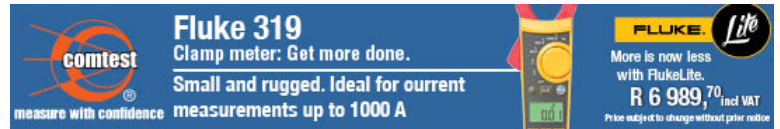


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The critical role of recyclers in the EPR ecosystem (/sparks-electrical-news/energy-efficiency/24561-the-critical-role-of-recyclers-in-the-epr-ecosystem)

31 May 2023



Now that Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legal criteria are fully in place in South Africa, local producers are responsible for the entire life cycle of the products they market and sell.



However, as Patricia Schröder, spokesperson for the producer responsibility organisation (PRO) Circular Energy emphasises, producers are not the only ones who bear duty. "Recyclers and service providers have a significant role to play in the EPR system. They ought to become involved, take advantage of chances to broaden their services, and help producers comply," she says.

A recycler's role in EPR Implementation

"Among all the different stakeholders involved in EPR, a recycler is one of the final role players in the system," Schröder notes. "They have a lot of duties that are of great importance, as they are the end point where packaging and e-waste recycling and processing take place."

She says a first step would be for recycling organisations to approach producers and PROs with an efficient plan for recovering or recycling packaging and e-waste "In this plan, they should indicate and prove that their facility and recycling procedures follow established criteria or recommendations. This of course would include that no environmental harm is done when packaging waste and e-waste is stored, transported and treated. Furthermore, they should ensure that the recycling processes don't harm the environment or human health."

If done correctly, she says that service providers and recyclers have the power to make waste management initiatives so much more efficient. "They should, for instance, work with and uplift participating marginalised communities, like waste-pickers, in the waste management process."

In terms of paperwork, Schröder notes that all records should be made available to the relevant governing bodies by recyclers. "E-waste collection, disassembly, recycling, and delivery to authorised recyclers should all be documented."

Why and how recyclers should assist in producer compliance

Schröder says it is important that recycling professionals must be wary of harmful producer industry tactics like *greenwashing*.

She cites the environmental charity ClientEarth when defining greenwashing as "the process of making a corporation appear more climate friendly and environmentally sustainable than it actually is."

She says that service providers and recyclers - being experts in their respective fields - would be able to recognise when the producers they work with are taking part in greenwashing practices, whether it is deliberate or mere ignorance.

"Then, they ought to inform the producers of the issue and warn them that making false environmental claims has serious repercussions, such as impeding the growth of the green economy. It could also cause massive damage to their reputation."

As a last point, Schröder reminds recyclers that they work within an ecosystem. “All the role players can and should assist each other to be more compliant, leading to greater success for all businesses involved.”

Different types of greenwashing

“One of the biggest concerns regarding greenwashing, is how intricate the deceptive tactics have become,” Schröder warns. She refers to a report by the non-profit financial think tank Planet Tracker, titled “The Greenwashing Hydra”, that explains the sophisticated schemes some producers and organisations resort to.

“One of the tactics the authors of the report has observed is called *Greencrowding*,” Schröder says. “It relies on safety in numbers and is based on the idea that you could hide in a crowd to avoid detection. However, a closer look reveals that none of these organisations' progress reports offer open, quantifiable, and audited data.”

Another tactic used is *Greenlighting*. This occurs when company communications stress a particularly green characteristic of its operations or products, however tiny, in order to shift attention away from ecologically damaging actions being performed elsewhere.

Greenlabelling is also a deceptive method. “This is when the term “green” or “sustainable” is used by marketers, but a deeper look reveals that their claims are false. It is challenging for a layperson to understand the numerous environmental labels. Terms like ‘bio’, ‘from nature’, ‘natural’, ‘green’ and ‘eco-friendly’ are commonly used, but poorly defined and therefore abused.”

Consequences could be dire

Schröder emphasises that it is crucial to remember that making false environmental claims has huge consequences – like hindering the development of the green economy. “Greenwashing hampers sustainability. It makes it easy for customers, governments, and even businesses to believe the environment is benefitting from certain practices, when in effect, nothing is happening.”

Producers also stand to lose big, though. “A backlash will most probably occur if a firm is exposed as exaggerating its environmental promises. They are then likely to suffer the resulting consumer backlash. When customers go so far as to boycott producers they deem as dishonest, it might further result in a decline in sales.

Nowadays, investors, customers, and employees want producers and companies to act in a sustainable manner. If it becomes apparent that you were part of a greenwashing scheme – whether intentional or not – the reputational damage can be huge,” she concludes.

Enquiries: www.circular-energy.org (http://em2.medialist.co.za/ls/click?upn=PiG6xKIUz6CI9ReUrUt4Z-2BNaal34Kd-2FOZTdzU2qaPGwUse-2Bw19cmrBRgYsPHailMI1Fi_ymUFC7pjOIENuFJhCWRCkPdNjy5G-2BSfRVBVXo-2Bw2CFF0oZpfacxipn8BV7cpQfLG5sMCEeAYAfIn5YQhTuxoQ2vBHN03hY0dk7OwHvzda4wT1BBI7z9BTDOArIzGsxifWvMtoKO75ulVu8TNSLVMeesKtRA-2FZzCsmLC4AVDJ1pNOOTI5gBPv9-2FZAkSKkeERSdKYn2NFBcip6gEkj-2BlzDA-3D-3D)

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