

Joint press release Oeko-Institut and Pforzheim University

Freiburg/Berlin, 9 July 2020

Press inquiries:

Phone: +49 30 405085-333

Email: presse@oeko.de

Public Relations & Communications Department

Mandy Schossig

Borkumstraße 2

D-13189 Berlin

Phone: +49 30 405085-334

Email: m.schossig@oeko.de

Prevent premature obsolescence, prolong service life – Recommendations for sustainable product policy

Introduce mandatory minimum lifetime information, strengthen purchasers' rights, improve conditions for repairs – these and other strategies for greater durability and longer use of electrical and electronic devices are recommended by the Oeko-Institut and the Centre for Consumer Research and Sustainable Consumption (vunk) at Pforzheim University. The proposals support the objectives of the European Green Deal and the European Commission's Circular Economy Action Plan.

The aim is to tackle the premature product obsolescence that leads to products being replaced before the end of their expected lifespan. Various studies by the [Oeko-Institut](https://www.oeko.de) and [vunk Pforzheim](https://www.vunk-pforzheim.de) have shown how this could be achieved. On behalf of the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA), the experts have now drawn up further proposals.

“To ensure that electrical and electronic equipment lasts longer, we need a wide-ranging strategy for tackling premature obsolescence, including legal instruments at national and European level,” says Friedhelm Keimeyer, a specialist in environmental and energy law at the Oeko-Institut.

1. Make specification of minimum lifetime mandatory

The authors recommend that manufacturers shall be obliged to provide a minimum lifetime information on products at the point of sale. This is essential to enable consumers to consider this information when buying a new device.

“If a device wears out earlier than stated, consumers could enforce their warranty rights – a real incentive for manufacturers to sell genuinely long-lasting products,” says Prof. Tobias Brönneke, head of vunk Pforzheim.

2. Transpose the European Sale of Goods Directive into German law

The German government should also strengthen consumers' rights when revising German sales law, which is in any case due for reform by 2021 in view of the new European Sale of Goods Directive. In this context the Oeko-Institut and vunk Pforzheim recommend that the warranty on products should no longer be restricted to two years but should rather be defined according to the expected lifespan of products. Other countries including the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and Norway are already a long way ahead of Germany in this respect.

“If products in general last longer, consumers' rights under sales law should not expire before one can even recognise the inherent defects present in the products” says Prof. Rainer Gildeggen of vunk Pforzheim. “This move would

improve consumer protection and fairness in sales law and also make consumption generally more sustainable.”

Another point is that reversal of the burden of proof currently applies for the first six months after a consumer buys a product. During this period the company selling the product must demonstrate that the product was in conformity with the contract at the time of delivery or supply. Here Germany should – like France and Portugal – aim for ambitious implementation of the Sale of Goods Directive and extend the period of reversal of the burden of proof to two years.

3. Improve conditions for repairs

In addition, the new requirements in relation to repairs and spare parts in the EU’s Ecodesign Directive should apply not only to the five product groups covered so far, but to all electrical and electronic appliances. This would mean that spare parts for these items, too, would have to be available for a longer period.

Furthermore, all EU member states should set up an independent registration system of “professional repairers”, which would include not only manufacturers’ repair businesses but also independent repairers and qualified repair cafes. “An independent register of this sort ensures that manufacturers are required to provide all registered members with spare parts and repair and maintenance information on the same terms and not limit this provision to their own brand or authorised repairers as they do now,” explains Siddharth Prakash, specialist in sustainable consumption at the Oeko-Institut.

[Study “Weiterentwicklung von Strategien gegen Obsoleszenz einschließlich rechtlicher Instrumente” \[“Further development of strategies to tackle obsolescence including legal instruments”, with a summary in English language\] by the Oeko-Institut and vunk Pforzheim](#)

Contacts at the Oeko-Institut

For legal queries:

Friedhelm Keimeyer
Deputy Head of the Environmental Law & Governance Division
Oeko-Institut (Institute for Applied Ecology), Berlin office
Phone: ++49 30 405085-308
Email: f.keimeyer@oeko.de

For technical queries:

Siddharth Prakash
Senior Researcher in the Products & Material Flows Division
Oeko-Institut (Institute for Applied Ecology), Freiburg office
Phone: ++49 761 45295-244
Email: s.prakash@oeko.de

Contact at the Centre for Consumer Research and Sustainable Consumption (vunk) at Pforzheim University

Press inquiries:

Phone: +49 30 405085-333
Email: presse@oeko.de

Public Relations & Communications Department

Mandy Schossig
Borkumstraße 2
D-13189 Berlin

Phone: +49 30 405085-334
Email: m.schossig@oeko.de

Prof. Tobias Brönneke
Head of vunk
Phone: ++49 178 1767565
Press office: ++49 7231 286005
Email: tobias.broenneke@hs-pforzheim.de

Oeko-Institut is a leading independent research and consultancy institution 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.

oeko.de | blog.oeko.de | [Twitter](https://twitter.com) | [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com) | [Online magazine eco@work](http://online-magazine.eco@work)

vunk – the Centre for Consumer Research and Sustainable Consumption at Pforzheim University – adopts a broad-based and in-depth interdisciplinary approach. The starting point for its analyses is the role of the private consumer in the market. Legal experts, economists, engineers and design specialists work together on research, policy consultancy and teaching.

www.hs-pforzheim.de/vunk | www.hs-pforzheim.de/obsoleszenz

Press inquiries:

Phone: +49 30 405085-333
Email: presse@oeko.de

Public Relations & Communications Department

Mandy Schossig
Borkumstraße 2
D-13189 Berlin

Phone: +49 30 405085-334
Email: m.schossig@oeko.de
