Goal: Reducing Residual Waste

Manufacturing always generates waste materials. A closed-loop economy is the goal: at VAUDE, most of our waste is recycled, but a small proportion of it continues to be our “problem child”.

“Rubbish” or raw materials?

"Rubbish" is a key environmental issue. For one, it means that limited resources are wasted. For another, some types of waste (such as plastic bags or synthetic microparticles that end up in the oceans) pose a serious threat to wildlife. Read more about it here.

Last but not least, hazardous substances can be released into the environment if waste is not disposed of properly.

Avoiding waste, as much as possible
Despite the fact that waste management is already very well regulated in Germany, it is still an important environmental issue. In Germany, a total of 414 million tonnes of waste was generated in 2020. The recycling rate has also remained relatively constant in recent years (67.4% in 2020). In this context, the Federal Government has indeed achieved its target according to the Law on Life-Cycle-Management (65% of all municipal waste). However, this also means that 35% of waste is still not recycled. We are therefore a long way from a true circular economy. Greenpeace even speaks of illegal export of non-recyclable waste from Germany to Southeast Asia or Turkey: read more here.

As part of the European Green Deal, the EU is trying to find solutions for higher recycling rates. Among other things, new EU-wide rules for packaging in November 2022 are proposed. More here. VAUDE deals extensively with the topic of packaging and tries to reduce it or replace it with recycled alternatives. More information on the topic of packaging can be found here.

Waste at VAUDE
Residual waste continues to be our "problem child"

All waste generated at VAUDE in Tettnang is collected by local disposal companies and disposed of properly. The percentage of residual waste from the total waste generated at VAUDE in Tettnang-Obereisenbach was 13 percent in 2022, a slight increase from the previous year.

We keep records of all textile waste that is disposed of as residual waste separately and therefore able to monitor how the quantities are developing.

Much of this ends up in the upcycling program (more about this here).

Waste from marketing events for which sorting would be too complex as well as products from our repair service that can no longer be repaired and cannot be used as a second hand products are also disposed of as residual waste. The criteria we use to sort such products are taken directly from the non-profit organization FairWertung, where we donate all products that can still be used. More about this here.

You can find out more about repairs at VAUDE here.

“Thermal recycling”

Still have far too much residual waste that is not recycled but “thermally recycled” – incinerated as fuel for energy-intensive industries such as cement production or energy generation.

This is better than not using residual waste at all, but of course, it would be much better from an ecological standpoint if we reduced our residual waste as much as possible.

Therefore, we are trying to achieve a higher material efficiency in the Manufaktur by optimizing the patterns and the production processes, so we don’t need to throw as much material away. Read more about the material efficiency of the VAUDE manufactory here.

We are also involved in a research project looking for industrial partners who can use coated plastics for recycling despite the relatively small quantity – so far without success. There are two issues here – our quantities are quite small on an industrial scale and TPU-coated polyester materials are not homogeneous and therefore a real challenge for recyclers.

One example was the ReWerk project, in which we collaborated with partners from the fields of science and industry to research solutions that would enable the recycling and reuse of our material remnants from VAUDE products with innovative mechanical recycling processes.
**Waste compared to company growth**

Unfortunately, waste often grows with the growth of a company. The goal must therefore be to decouple the company's success from resource consumption and thus also from the volume of waste; more ideally, the total volume of waste and the volume of residual waste should decrease even as the company grows. In the following graphic, we show the development of waste volumes in comparison with sales growth.

**Waste in relation to sales growth**

![Chart showing waste vs. sales growth]

**Trainee challenge against residual waste**

Because we know that our percentage of residual waste is too high, our VAUDE trainees are now starting a "residual waste challenge". Together with the department heads of Manufacturing, Logistics, Maintenance and Marketing and the VAUDE CSR Team as well as the help of an external waste consultant, they are investigating the sources of residual waste, developing a package of measures to counteract the problem and working on a campaign to raise awareness and train employees. We are looking forward to the results and will continue to report on them [here](#).

And what other problems we have with packaging,[here](#).

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