

HOW TO TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION AGAINST PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE

Moving towards more sustainable consumption

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SUMMARY

Planned obsolescence may be defined as the pre-programmed reduction of products' life spans. The phenomenon has a long history, and the first examples of its use date back to the 1920s. Planned obsolescence really began to be analysed and criticised in the early 1960s, especially by political theorists committed to the ecological cause. The subject has nevertheless only attracted widespread public interest since the early 2010s.

The practice has multiple consequences with environmental, social, health-related and cultural implications. A complex phenomenon that goes beyond the most blatant excesses of carefully and deliberately calculated malfunctions designed to curtail a product's life span, planned obsolescence involves a large number of stakeholders, manufacturers, distributors and repairers. It is above all the reflection of an era and economic model that prioritises the rapid replacement of products as a key element in a certain form of growth.

In France, planned obsolescence has been incorporated into the energy transition law. This gives an official definition of the practice and provides for a system of financial sanctions.

A legal and administrative framework is nevertheless insufficient to fully control the phenomenon. This note will first introduce the different issues and challenges posed by planned obsolescence and then outline new strategies designed to seek solutions to this problem.

The working group that has produced this note has wished to avoid adopting a dogmatic approach, refraining in particular from any direct attack against the industrial sector. We had very quickly come to the conclusion that the responsibility for planned obsolescence was jointly shared by multiple stakeholders, including designers, manufacturers, distributors, consumers and repairers. We considered it incumbent upon us to undertake a range of interviews to hear different viewpoints and to engage in discussions with them.

Three major recommendations are presented:

- 1) The first is to guarantee the repairability of products through a more determined application of, and a number of amendments to, the French Consumer Law of 17 March 2014 (known as the *'Loi Hamon'*).
- 2) The second is to incorporate into product prices criteria that favour more prolonged usage and extended life spans. This would involve the calculation of eco-contributions based on these criteria.
- 3) The third aims to make visible to consumers any information relating to products' life spans, so that they can engage more fully in a policy of responsible purchasing.