

Terminological inconsistencies in German construction waste law and their impact on separation practices in the context of the circular economy

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

The economic viability of circular construction materials such as recycled concrete significantly depends on clear waste classification. Terminological inconsistencies within Chapter 17 of the German Waste Catalogue Ordinance (AVV), particularly concerning “construction debris” and “mixed construction and demolition waste,” impede precise separation and result in inefficient material flows and increased disposal costs. This study systematically analyzes these inconsistencies and proposes a terminological refinement to enhance transparency and circular material management.

METHOD

1. Website-based benchmarking of container service cost-calculation tools to identify practical terminological deviations.
2. Qualitative content analysis following Mayring, based on key legal frameworks (AVV, GewAbfV, ErsatzbaustoffV), to explicate and systematize the terms “construction debris” and “mixed construction and demolition waste.”

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that the structure of Chapter 17 of the German Waste Catalogue Ordinance (AVV) does not provide a clear terminological distinction between mineral construction debris and mixed construction and demolition waste. In particular, waste group 17 01 lacks an explicit and consistent definition as “construction debris.” Based on the explicative content analysis, a terminological refinement is proposed:

1. AVV 17 01 (“Concrete, bricks, tiles and ceramics”) → uniform definition as “construction debris” (exclusively mineral).
2. Mixed construction and demolition waste → clear delineation as a distinct waste category.
3. Differentiation according to recovery potential: secondary construction material vs. construction waste. This systematization increases legal clarity in enforcement and enhances transparency of mineral material flows.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual draft of a proposed terminological refinement of AVV Chapter 17 and does not represent the original legal structure. The elements highlighted in red indicate suggested additions and systematizations derived from this study.

Waste code	Waste designation
17	Construction and demolition waste (including excavated soil from contaminated
17 01	Concrete, bricks, tiles and ceramics (construction debris)
17 09	Mixed construction and demolition waste (17 01 up to and including 17 08)
17 10	Other construction and demolition waste
17 10 01*	Other construction and demolition waste containing mercury
17 10 02*	Other construction and demolition waste containing PCBs
17 10 03*	Other construction and demolition waste containing hazardous substances
17 10 04*	Mixed other construction and demolition waste, excluding those mentioned in 17 10 01, 17 10 02 and 17 10 03

Figure 1 Conceptual Proposal for the Systematization of AVV Chapter 17, Zdankina

CONCLUSION

The current structure of AVV Chapter 17 lacks terminological precision regarding mineral construction debris and mixed construction waste. A refined classification enhances legal clarity, improves separation practices, and strengthens circular material flows in the construction sector. Harmonizing terminology at the European level—aligned with the List of Waste framework—would further improve cross-border comparability, regulatory consistency, and the statistical monitoring of mineral material flows.

FUTURE WORK

Future research should evaluate the practical implementation of the proposed classification and assess its economic impact on waste separation practices. Furthermore, harmonization at the European level could improve comparability and statistical tracking of mineral material flows.