

What's in my rubbish?

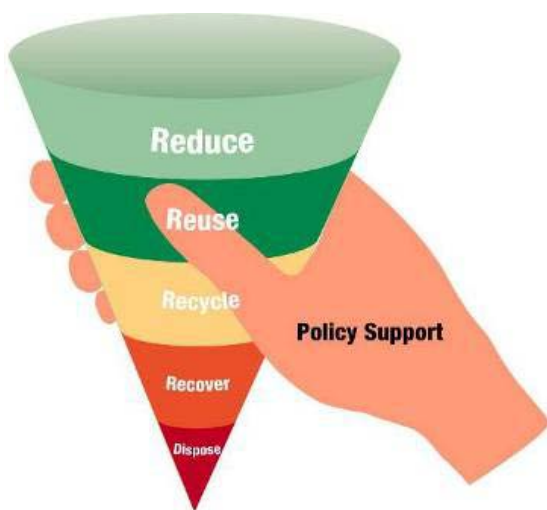
Fact Sheet 2

This fact sheet focuses on the different types of rubbish we throw away, what it can be reused as or recycled into and whether it contains hazardous components that will need to be treated in a special way.

On average people in the UK throw away seven times their own body weight in rubbish every year! The rubbish you produce is picked up every week by your local authority and they have to find a way of disposing of it. To help the environment by limiting the amount of waste your local authority has to dispose of there are a number of ways you can make a difference. Firstly by thinking about the rubbish that you produce at the moment – how can you reduce it? Can you recycle or compost more of your waste?

Waste Options

The waste hierarchy is a tool that we can use to help us make decisions about how to deal with the waste we produce. It gives a list of options in order of preference that starts with reduction as the best option and ends with disposal, which is the least preferred option.



Reduce

The best way to deal with our waste is not to produce it in the first place! We need to minimise the amount of waste we produce. There are several ways that you can minimise your waste. Taking reusable bags to the supermarket so that you do not have to use the plastic bags that are given away. Buy fruit loose instead of in packaging. Use cloth nappies instead of disposable ones. One million tonnes of nappies are thrown away every year, that's 8 million nappies every day. Each child uses a total of 5850 nappies in their lifetime; that weighs the same as the average family car! Babies' disposable

nappies make up about 2-4% of the average household rubbish bin. This equates to 400,000 tonnes sent to Landfill every year.

Reuse

Many things can be used again with just a little cleaning or repair. Why not use glass jars as storage containers or old clothes as dusters? Old toys and clothes can be donated to charity shops or sold at car boot sales.

Recycle and compost

Some local authorities in the UK now have recycling rates of over 50%. This means that their residents are recycling over half of the contents of their bins. Your local authority will be able to tell you what you can and can't recycle in your kerbside collection or at your local bring banks or household waste recycling centre. Many local authorities collect garden and kitchen waste at the kerbside. If you have a garden you can also try home composting your green waste such as your grass cuttings and vegetable peelings.

Recover

After you have recycled and composted as much as possible from your rubbish it is possible to gain heat and/or electricity from the waste that remains. There are many different waste treatment technologies that do this: Energy from Waste, Gasification, Pyrolysis and Anaerobic Digestion. If you would like to find out more about these processes please read the other fact sheets in this series.

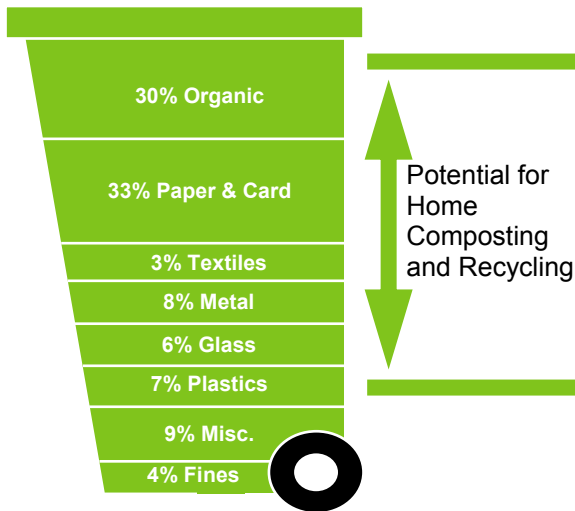
Disposal

After you have recycled and composted as much as you can from your rubbish if there are no options available for recovering further value through treatments that provide heat and/or energy your rubbish will end up in landfill. Even if your rubbish is used to provide heat and/or electricity there will be a certain amount of the end product that will end up in landfill. The waste hierarchy shows us how to send as little of our rubbish as possible to landfill.



What's in my bin?

The rubbish we throw away each week is made up of the following materials:



The contents of everyone's bin or black sack is slightly different depending on the food we eat, the items we buy and whether we have a garden or not. The percentages listed above are for an 'average' bin (weight) and indicates that over 60% can be recycled/composted. Separating the categories makes it clear that a lot of the materials we throw away every day can be reused or recycled.

Why Recycle?

After you have tried to reduce and reuse as much of your rubbish as possible the next best thing for the environment is to recycle. Most of the raw materials needed to make the products that we use everyday such as plastics, and aluminium are finite which means that our supply of them will eventually run out. Recycling helps to protect the environment by reusing the materials that we already have to make into new products. Try and recycle everything you can and remember to look for products with recycled content when you're out at the supermarket.



Cans

Approximately 620 million aluminium cans are used over the December period in the UK. That's equivalent to the weight of 11,000 cars! In the year 2000, 3 billion cans worth £22.5 million were lost to landfill in the UK.



Paper

Paper and card are the materials we throw away the most, making up over a third of the rubbish we produce. Paper and card can easily be recycled into new paper and card for example, most of the newspapers we read today are made from the paper we recycled last week. For every tonne of paper recycled, 17 trees are spared, 320 tonnes of water is saved and 4200Kwh less electricity used.

Glass

On average every family uses around 330 glass bottles and jars per year. Recycling two bottles saves enough energy to boil water for five cups of tea or to power a computer for 50 minutes! Glass bottles and jars can be recycled into new glass bottles and jars or used in industry as aggregate (building) material or sand.



Plastics

We produce 20 times more plastic today than we did 50 years ago. 17 billion plastic carrier bags are given away by supermarkets each year – 290 bags per person! Only certain types of plastic can easily be recycled at the moment – usually plastic bottles. Recycled plastic can be made into lots of new products including fleece jackets and new plastic packaging. Recycling a single plastic bottle can conserve enough energy to light a 60W light bulb for up to 6 hours. Try and do your bit by taking cloth bags with you to the supermarket or using a 'bag for life'.



Household Hazardous Waste

Waste is classed as hazardous when the materials it contains or the properties it has might make it harmful to human health or the environment. The term 'hazardous' does not always mean that the waste is immediately toxic (although it might do) but acts as a guide that tells us that we need to take special care when treating and disposing of the waste.



Just as you take care when using cleaning chemicals around the house, pesticides and fertilizers in the garden or oil in the garage care must be taken when you throw these products away. As much as 5% of household waste can be classified as hazardous and this contributes to the five million tonnes of hazardous waste which is produced in England and Wales every year. Half of this waste is disposed of in landfill sites however; new legislation means that hazardous waste cannot be disposed of with non-hazardous waste anymore. For a long time hazardous and non-hazardous wastes have been disposed of together in the same landfill. The Landfill Directive bans this practice and wastes will need to be collected and disposed of separately. This ban, which came into force on the 16 July 2005, makes a big change to the way we manage waste in the UK. The tighter controls mean positive steps to reduce risks to human health and the environment both now and in the future.

What do I need to take care with?

The regulations introduced included some new materials that need to be disposed of carefully. Some common household items that are now classed as hazardous waste are listed below.

Fluorescent Tubes



These are the lights that are commonly found in kitchens or offices. When they have reached the end of their life take them to your local Household waste recycling centre for disposal.

Televisions & computer monitors



Inside your television or computer monitor is a part called a cathode ray tube. This is the part of your monitor that helps to transmit the pictures to your screen. Inside this component are a number of chemicals that need to be treated with care when the television is disposed of. If you are getting rid of your old television or computer monitor you should either take it to your local household waste recycling facility or if you are buying a new replacement see if the store will take your old one.

Household Chemicals

If you are using household cleaners, paint, paint thinners, or garden chemicals such as pesticides and fertilizers you should take as much care in how you use them as how you dispose of them. Try and finish the product so that you are not throwing any away. If you find that you have lots of half empty bottles that are too old to use please take them to your local Household waste recycling facility if they can be safely transported. Most Household waste recycling facilities will have storage facilities for small amounts of this type of waste.



Oil

One litre of oil can pollute one million litres of fresh drinking water. Why not have your oil changed at a certified garage to save yourself the trouble of having to dispose of the waste oil? If you do change it at home make sure that do not spill any and take your waste oil to a household waste recycling centre. Waste oil from nearly three million car oil changes in Britain is not collected; if collected properly, this could meet the annual energy needs of 1.5 million people.



Fridges and Freezers

We all know about the harmful gases called CFCs that can be found in our Fridges. These gases can have a series effect on our Ozone layer and need to be extracted carefully so that none of the gases can escape. A lot of manufacturers will take your old appliance away now when you buy a new one. You can also telephone your Local Authority for details of your nearest Household waste recycling centre or bulky waste collection service.



Batteries

Car batteries and household batteries contain chemicals and metals that could be harmful to the environment and to humans if they weren't recycled or disposed of carefully. Certified garages (for car batteries) or Household waste recycling facilities should have special storage facilities to take all your batteries. You might be able to recycle your household batteries along with other recyclables at your kerbside – check with your Local Authority for more details. Some DIY stores and retailers such as mobile phone shops have battery collection points that you can drop your household or phone batteries off to.

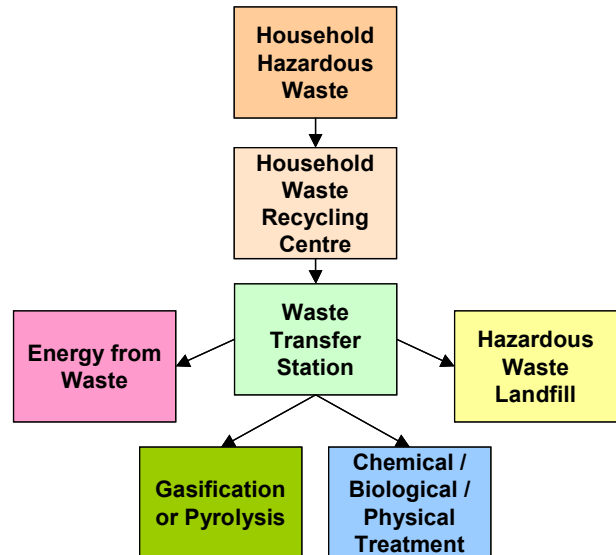


Asbestos

Although not usually used in modern buildings, asbestos was traditionally used as a building material in roofing and insulation. If you are planning to carry out some building work on an older property, outhouse or garage contact your local authority officer for advice about the safe treatment and disposal of asbestos and which builders are licensed to deal with it.

Recycling, Treatment and Disposal

Hazardous waste needs to be treated with care. Your Local Authority has special sites such as your Household waste recycling centre that are licensed and capable of taking hazardous waste. The materials present in the waste dictate the recycling, treatment or disposal method used to manage the waste.



Where facilities exist the waste will be recycled. For example, there are Fridge reprocessing and battery recycling plants in the UK that can remove the hazardous components of the waste and recycle valuable materials present in the item. Some materials such as asbestos will still have to go to Landfill, as no techniques are available at the moment to treat the asbestos safely.

All waste management facilities are very strictly regulated by the Environment Agency and are regularly checked to make sure that they are complying with the high standards of human health and environmental protection required.

What can I do?

Think about the products that you are buying. Can you buy rechargeable batteries, or more environmentally friendly cleaning products? Take care with how you dispose of products. Might the item that you're throwing away contain chemicals that will be harmful to human health or the environment? If you have any questions get in touch with your local authority.

For additional information visit:
www.wasteawarenesswales.org.uk