

Government Review of Waste Policy 2011

– what this means for the environment

Why waste matters

Sustainable waste policies are an important part of tackling climate change and protecting our natural resources. If we want a more sustainable economy, we need to reduce waste and make better use of what we produce.

That's why the government has reviewed and improved its waste policies. This factsheet tells you what we plan to do and how it will help the environment.

A zero waste economy

Despite good progress in reducing waste, the UK is still sending 44 million tonnes a year to landfill. This generates methane emissions and the waste sector is estimated to account for around 3% of all UK emissions. But the overall impact of waste policies on reducing carbon across the economy goes much further. The government wants to move beyond this throwaway society to a "zero waste economy" where we reuse and recycle all we can and throw away only as a last resort.

Prevention is best

Our first aim should be to prevent waste by being smarter about how we produce goods and use materials. The government will help by promoting product design and manufacture that enables easier upgrades, repair and recycling at end of life.

These efforts will be targeted at products with high carbon impacts, such as food, metals, plastics, textiles and wood.

Reducing landfill

We will do more to reduce the impact of landfill waste by:

- Consulting on banning wood waste from landfill and considering the feasibility of banning other materials in the future;
- Recovering materials from items such as mobile phones and electrical goods at their end of life;
- Promoting technologies that can capture methane from landfill sites so it can be used as fuel.

Tackling food waste

Every tonne of food and drink wasted creates around 4 tonnes of CO₂. Food waste also costs business and households money – it can't be right that UK households throw away £12 billion of good food and drink every year. We'll work with the public and private sectors to help businesses and consumers drive down avoidable food waste.

More recycling

We will consult on higher recycling targets for packaging, particularly in areas such as plastic and aluminium where recycling rates are low.

You should be able to recycle when you are out and about – we will help businesses and councils who want to work together to put more recycling bins in places like shopping centres and high streets.

Working with businesses

Businesses have a big role to play in managing waste. We will work with them to reduce their waste through voluntary agreements – and invite producers to enter responsibility deals where they take responsibility for the whole life cycle of their products.

Did you know?

- Anaerobic digestion could produce enough electricity for 3m people – the combined populations of Birmingham and Nottingham.
- Waste services cost the average household over £145 per year.

Find out more

There's more information about waste on these websites:

Defra - www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste

WRAP - www.wrap.org.uk

Environment Agency - www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/waste