


Waste at work information sheet



 [Why bother?](#)

 [How much?](#)

 [Waste reduction - the first option](#)

 [Recycling](#)

 [Green procurement - buy recycled](#)

 [Useful contacts](#)

Why bother?

Waste has become an increasingly difficult environmental and economic problem, one which affects us all and to which we all contribute. Individuals, at home or at work, have a vital role to play in schemes to reduce waste.

Today's complex, technologically based society, combined with population growth, has led to the generation of enormous quantities of waste. As more businesses and organisations consider the effects of their activities on the environment, waste generated at work is increasingly receiving attention. More and more, the production of waste is seen as a form of inefficiency and misuse of resources, which has both economic and environmental implications for individual companies and the country as a whole. Envirowise estimate that waste typically costs companies 4.5% of their turnover.¹

All businesses have a legal duty to provide appropriate arrangements for the disposal of their waste. There is usually a charge for commercial waste collection, so by reducing the quantity of waste required for collection, companies can reduce the cost of waste disposal. For example, between 1996 and 2000, over 120 waste minimisation clubs involving 5,000 companies were active across the UK. Combined, they managed to achieve a reduction in solid waste of at least 0.75 million tonnes, with financial savings of over £20 million.²

How much?

Waste from office premises is included in commercial waste, which forms 6% of the 434 million tonnes of total solid waste produced annually in the country.

Industry and commerce produced about 75 million tonnes of waste in 1998/99 in England and Wales.³ In that year 68% of commercial waste was landfilled, 4% was incinerated and 29% was recycled or composted.⁴

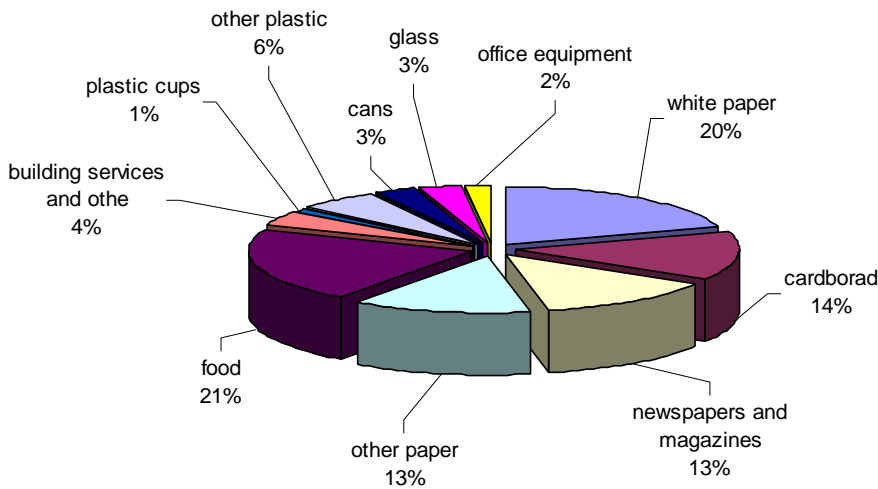
¹ Envirowise online Waste Minimisation Guide, www.envirowise.gov.uk

² The Environment Agency, www.environment-agency.gov.uk (Waste/business/waste minimisation/ waste minimisation clubs)

³ The Environment Agency, www.environment-agency.gov.uk (Waste - an overview)

⁴ Cabinet Office, *The Waste Project - A performance and innovation unit scoping paper*, 2001

Office and Commercial Wastes



Waste profile of financial sector head offices

A recent study of resource consumption and waste generation of the financial sector found that 60% of the waste produced in company head offices was paper waste, including printing and writing paper, newspapers and magazines and cardboard.⁵

- Wastes from catering and leisure facilities contain significant amounts of glass, beverage cans, plastics, paper and board packaging and food waste. In a recent investigation of the financial sector, food waste constituted the largest single proportion of all the waste, accounting for an average 21% of total waste arisings. Other catering related wastes include packaging materials such as cans (3%), plastic cups (1%) and glass (3%).⁶

Waste reduction - the first option

In any definition of the waste management hierarchy, waste minimisation comes at the top. Both environmentally and economically it makes no sense to produce items which are not necessary and which rapidly become waste. The imminent threat of climate change through global warming is increasingly calling into question how long the developed nations can continue to consume energy and resources at their current rate. Consuming less is the most fundamental step in moving towards a more sustainable society and in reducing waste, however, since it involves fundamental changes in attitude, it is a much more difficult thing to achieve, and to measure, than recycling.

Waste Audits

An important step in instituting a waste minimisation programme is to conduct an audit to measure the usage of consumables, and the types and amount of waste produced. It provides a baseline from which to measure the effectiveness of the programme. This can be very significant in terms of motivation, as many waste minimisation measures seem, on the face of it, to be quite trivial. The results, though, are cumulative, and often quite startling. For example, one office found that using both sides of A4 paper would save £4000 per year. The audit can either be undertaken by company staff, or by an outside organisation, such as an environmental consultancy.

The basic role of a waste audit is to identify the what, where and how of waste generation. It should include both the nature and amount of waste, and its cost to the company. As well as providing a benchmark by which to measure the success of waste minimisation procedures, it will identify opportunities for implementing such procedures. A waste audit should:

- Identify all points at which waste is generated
- Identify the origin of each type of waste
- Monitor the waste to identify its quantity and type, and its environmental effects

⁵ Waste Watch, *Rethinking waste management to reap rewards – minimising waste for business benefit*, 2004, p.11

⁶ Waste Watch, *Rethinking waste management to reap rewards – minimising waste for business benefit*, 2004, p.11

- Establish methods of measuring the waste for monitoring purposes
- Identify the costs of the current disposal methods, including treatment, handling, storage and transport. Identify any wastes which are hazardous and consider how they can be separated from the main waste stream, or replaced with a non-hazardous product.
- Look at opportunities to reduce, recycle or re-use the waste
- Set targets for reducing waste

Durability and obsolescence

- Product durability and life span are now receiving increasing attention in the office; these issues are particularly relevant to capital items such as computers and similar hardware. Increasing the life span of products is a key factor in reducing their environmental impact, since, on average, for one tonne of waste at the consumer end of a manufactured article, there are 5 tonnes at the manufacturing stage and 20 tonnes at the site of initial resource extraction. The New Economics Foundation have found that there are complex influences which determine why products last for particular periods of time some relating to design and technology, others to cultural and economic factors
- A recent American study found that the production of a computer workstation led to 60kg of factory waste, 27kg more than the weight of the workstation itself.

Information about product life is scarce, but it appears that the average life of many consumer durables has been reduced. A strategy to increase product life would operate on two levels - designing products for a longer life and extending that life span through repair and reconditioning which might also include upgrading.

This would benefit the environment through the reduction in resource use, reduced pollution and less waste. There would also be economic benefits, since service and repair work would be carried out mainly in the UK even if the item was originally imported. There are possible disadvantages. A product designed to last longer may require an increased use of materials and different types of materials some of which may be less easy to recycle once the product has to be discarded. Another concern is that keeping products in service longer will mean foregoing the benefits of improved environmental performance, for example in energy efficiency, until a later date. However, this has to be set against the energy used in producing the product in the first place, which can be greater than the energy used during its lifespan. The aim is to achieve the optimal life span rather than the maximum life span for a product. Ensuring that the best balance is observed – longevity, design for recycling and product use is achieved using life-cycle analysis study.

Disposables vs. long life products

There are many products which are designed for single or short life usage which are commonly found in the office or workplace. Examples include non-refillable ball-point pens, marker pens, plastic cups and cutlery, plastic pots for single portions of milk, disposable wiping cloths, paper towels and metal staples. All these products require raw materials and energy for their production, and resources to deal with their disposal, each process producing environmental impacts. In many instances longer life products can be substituted, sometimes through rediscovered old technology, such as the fountain pen, sometimes through new products, such as refillable marker pens, or low energy light bulbs, which last as long as eight standard bulbs. Paper clips and staples can be replaced by a new type of stapler which does not use metal staples. In other instances, organisational changes may enable long life products such as real mugs, to be used in place of disposable cups

Use Your Purchasing Power to improve waste minimisation

Although much can be done to minimise waste and encourage reuse at an individual or departmental level, there are instances where the purchasing strategy of the whole company needs to be involved. This will most probably form part of a broader environmental management policy. For example, there may be more scope for buying in bulk to reduce packaging if this is instituted as company policy. Transit packaging may be reused, particularly if the deliveries are regular, or are within the same company

Involving everyone in everything

Communication amongst employees is vital for the success of waste minimisation schemes. Internal newsletters, presentations, stickers and posters are ways of communicating new initiatives and the progress of projects to staff in large organisations. It should be clear who are the people coordinating such schemes, and they need to be accessible to all staff. Leading by example will also help communicate the waste minimisation message to employees. One example is to develop a small system within the organisation to cut down on paper usage. Some of the cost savings resulting from reducing waste could be passed on to a charity chosen by the staff, to strengthen their motivation.

Recycling

Even with effective waste minimisation measures, there will still be a great deal of waste produced. Particularly for consumables, but also for products which are no longer serviceable or repairable, recycling extends the time over which raw materials can be used. Paper, printer cartridges polystyrene cups, drinks cans, glass bottles, telephones, and even cooking oil, are all workplace wastes which can be recycled. Facilities for recycling have increased rapidly in recent years and so has public interest.

Setting up a Successful Office Recycling Scheme

The essence of a successful office recycling scheme is simple - to collect together a sufficient quantity of a particular type of waste material, and find a merchant to take it away. However, in practice there are often problems to be overcome, and advance planning is essential, to ensure a scheme's success in a large company setting up a pilot scheme, on a modest scale, is a valuable first step which should enable problems to be eliminated at an early stage in particular, the four 'c's need to be addressed - communication, consultation, cooperation, coordination, as a successful recycling scheme will need to involve all the staff of the company

- Communication will be needed in a number of areas - between staff and management, between the company and merchants, between office staff and cleaning staff, and between the coordinator or coordinating team and other staff. Once established, the scheme will need to be built into induction programmes for new staff
- Consultation - there will be things to be found out and discussed before setting up the scheme.
- Cooperation - everyone needs to do their bit effectively for it to work, particularly in the sorting out of waste, such as types of waste paper
- Coordination - a scheme will need one person or a team (the Green Team/Eco-team etc), depending on company size, to set it up devise communication systems, provide feedback, and measure its effectiveness

Green procurement - buy recycled

The word "recycling" is often used to mean the return of materials to be recycled, via bottle banks, waste paper collections etc. However, this is only the first stage of the process. The collected materials have to be sorted and cleaned, then reprocessed and, finally, manufactured into new items which can be sold.

Recycling, therefore, involves all four stages - collection, sorting, manufacturing and purchasing.

Unless all four stages take place, recycling will not work. If markets do not exist for the collected material, it piles up, often at great expense, and cannot be used. The final stage, purchasing of recycled products, is vital for recycling to be economic and for recycling schemes, including those from offices, to be successful. By 'closing the loop' through purchasing office products made partially or wholly from reclaimed materials, we can ensure that the market for waste materials from offices remains strong and office recycling schemes will flourish.

What is a recycled product?

One of the problems of buying recycled products is the lack of consistency in the definitions used.

"Recycled" does not necessarily mean that a product has been made from 100% recovered materials.

There are many terms connected with recycled products which it is helpful to know, and which will enable purchasing specifications to be drawn up with a fair degree of accuracy. Recycled means that the product contains some materials which have been recovered, or previously manufactured.

Recovered materials may include both pre- and post- consumer use materials. Post-consumer materials are items that have been used, such as corrugated containers, office paper, pallets, drums, bottles and printed papers, and which are collected through office, commercial and household recycling schemes.

Pre-consumer materials are those that result from waste produced during the manufacturing process, such as trimmings, off-cuts and damaged produce. These may also be referred to as 'post-industrial' waste. So a "recycled" product could be made from 100% post-consumer waste, but, equally it might contain only 25% pre-consumer waste and 75% virgin material.

in addition to recycling waste materials back into similar products, there are many products in which waste is used to manufacture a radically different product. Waste newsprint is recycled into loft insulation. Old tyres are recycled into carpet underlay and porous hose pipes. Mixed plastic is used to manufacture a wood substitute. The imbalance between supply of collected waste material and its traditional uses is prompting more imaginative uses of reclaimed materials, with new products appearing all the time.

Finding recycled products

Many everyday purchases already contain significant amounts of reclaimed material. In some instances the performance of the material is unaffected by the recycled content, for example the use of recovered aluminium in beverage cans and glass in jars and bottles. The purchaser is unaware of the presence of reclaimed material and needs to make no conscious effort to select a particular product. Other frequently used items regularly containing reclaimed materials are relatively low grade items such as cardboard boxes and brown envelopes. Before waste became a matter of general concern the inclusion of recycled material in such items was not publicised, and it may still not be evident. Checking with your supplier should provide some information as to what extent items currently purchased include reclaimed content, its percentage and source - pre- or post-consumer waste.

In other situations it will be necessary to specify that your company wishes to use products which are recycled, for example with photocopier or printing papers. There are companies which specialise in providing technical information on recycled office products, particular paper, and also specialised suppliers of office products for the environmentally conscious office, which sell products containing recycled material.

Many regular office supply companies also carry product lines with recycled content in their catalogues. Many printers are now offering recycled paper as an option and it is worth talking with your regular printer when ordering letterheads and other stationery before looking elsewhere. <http://www.recycledproducts.org.uk> is a website with details of recycled products to help you with your purchasing.

Key office wastes and what to do with each one of them

Stationery and consumables

Minimise

- Use both sides of the paper. Whenever possible use double sided photocopying - and make sure that all staff regularly using photocopiers know how to do this. Better still, set the photocopier to default to double sided printing.
- Have a policy that photocopiers and printers always reset to single copy printing after someone has used them, and check anyway before using them.
- Put scrap pieces of paper together to make a notepad, use them for notes to colleagues too.
- Reuse envelopes for internal circulation and, if possible, externally with a reuse sticker.
- Regularly check computerised mailing lists and remove duplicates and out of date addresses.
- Review the need for computer print-outs from time to time - it is all too easy to go on printing out a regular fifty page report for the same ten people who have received it for the last two years - do they all still need it, do any of them need it?
- Keep a pile of good quality A4 scrap paper next to the printer for rough or trial copies. Out of date headed paper is ideal for this purpose.
- Use the smallest piece of paper appropriate to the task. For example, photocopy A3 documents to A4 size, use A5 size cover sheets for faxes, or just send one A4 page if the message is short.
- Reuse wallet folders, hanging file dividers and other storage items. Review procedures that require regular circulation of forms and memos, and consider how many can be eliminated.
- Large numbers of fasteners are used in offices, such as paper clips, drawing pins and staples. Some of these can be reused, but staples cannot. Even though they do not constitute a major part of the waste from offices, it is noteworthy that, in aggregate, they amount to a significant loss of resources. It has been calculated that if everyone in UK offices saved one staple a day that would be 72 tonnes of metal saved a year.
- Disposable pens can be replaced by refillable ballpoints and fountain pens but even these rely on disposable plastic and metal parts. Figures for the number of pens discarded are not easy to obtain, but US citizens throw out over 4 thousand million such pens daily. Disposable pens are now available made from recycled plastic and there is a range of marker pens which can be refilled.

Recycle

- Set up an office paper-recycling scheme. White paper is of a high grade and so is in demand from the paper industry. The market for this quality is much more stable than lower grades.
- Check with your current waste management company whether they offer waste collection services for recycling.

- Get in touch with your local authority recycling officer to check the services available. These may include storage containers or compacting equipment for large amounts of waste paper, as well as the handling of confidential paper waste.
- Send CDRoms for recycling (see contacts)
- Recycle ink cartridges or refill for your own use
- Encourage staff to participate in recycling by keeping them informed about recycling performance.
- Train your staff on the segregation of waste and provide appropriate storage containers, which are clearly labelled.

For further information on paper recycling please see Waste Watch's Paper Recycling information sheet.

Packaging

- Padded bags can be reused many times.
- Polystyrene beads can be collected up and saved for reuse.
- Paper unsuited to recycling, such as coloured paper, can be shredded and used as protective padding.
- Pieces of cards, such as those that form the back of A4 notepads, can be saved to stiffen envelopes, for sending photographs or artwork to printers.
- Cardboard boxes can be reused for sending bulk orders.
- Unusual sized envelopes are worth keeping for the occasional non-standard package.

Catering waste

To cut down on waste on an individual level, try some of the following suggestions:

- Bring sandwiches, or other lunch items, from home.
- Failing this, buy from a sandwich bar which makes the sandwiches on the spot and does not overpackage them.
- Use 'real' mugs, plates and cutlery rather than disposables, and make your own drinks rather than use a vending machine. if there are no facilities for washing up, request them!
- See if milk can be delivered to the premises in returnable bottles, rather than relying on cartons. Milk bottles are used an average of 20 times.
- When arranging food for meetings or conferences, try to ensure that disposables are not used. If the meeting is at company premises, provide the cutlery and crockery.

If the company has a cafeteria, consider the following:

- Are items such as butter, jam, salt, pepper and milk served in individually wrapped portions? Consider how this could be changed, through, for example, the use of dispensers.
- Check with suppliers to see if purchases could be delivered in fewer, larger cartons.
- Avoid the use of disposable cups, cutlery and other similar items, by changing to long life products.
- Is there any possibility of composting waste food, or having it collected separately for central composting?
- Review the wrapping on any pre-prepared food or snacks, and see if it can be reduced.
- Use paper napkins made of recycled paper.
- Bulk buy where possible to reduce the amount of packaging to be disposed of.
- Investigate the opportunities to compost any waste food, or look at central composting through your local authority or community group.
- If there is no real alternative to a vending machine with plastic cups for tea/coffee, there are schemes available that collect these for recycling – and provide recycled plastic cups for use with the machine. – see contacts
- Can banks could be provided for recycling cans. Collectors operate nationally and would be able to collect these from your offices, although you will need to be able to store the cans. – see contacts
- Cooking oil can be recycled, but again there is a minimum quantity for collection.

Computers and electrical equipment

- Try to repair equipment before having it replaced – invest in a long-term maintenance contract for any appliances.
- When buying replacement equipment such as printers, photocopiers and fax machines, choose those with a duplex option and recycle the outdated items.
- Once your equipment reaches the end of its life, take it to a computer / electronic recycling scheme.
- Mobile phones and their batteries can be recycled through a number of postal recycling schemes. Call the Waste Watch Wasteline for a list of contacts, or visit our website at <http://www.wasteonline.org.uk>
- Where possible try and use recycled or refilled toner cartridges (see our toner cartridge information sheet for more details)

Miscellaneous

- Make sure your mailing lists are up to date to avoid sending out unnecessary details.
- Join your local business in the environment group. This provides a great way to exchange practical ideas with others who are trying to improve their environmental performance.
- Encourage staff to use public transport, cycle or walk to work, and pool cars, where possible.

Useful contacts

British Recovered Paper Association

Papermakers House, Riverhall Road, Westlea,
Swindon, Wiltshire, SN5 7BN
t 01793 889 602
Fax. 01606 854 903
<http://www.recycledpaper.org.uk>

Confederation of Paper Industries

Papermakers House, Rivenhall Road, Westlea,
Swindon, Wiltshire SN5 7BD
t 01793 889600 f 01793 886182
info@confedpaper.org.uk
<http://www.paper.org.uk>

Directory Recycling Project

Television Centre
Southampton SO14 OPZ
t 0800 783 1592
directory.recycling@btinternet.com
The project provides information on telephone directory recycling facilities across the UK.

Environment Agency

Head Office Public Enquiries Unit, Rio House,
Waterside Drive, Aztec West,
Almondsbury, Bristol BS32 4UD
t 08459 333111
enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk>

Fax Preference Service

DMA House
70 Margaret Street
London
W1W 8SS
t 020 7291 3330 f 020 7323 4226

Business in the Community / Business in the Environment

137 Shepherdess Walk, London N1 7RQ
t 0870 600 2482
information@bitc.org.uk
<http://www.bitc.org.uk>
Business in the Community is an independent charity working to create a public benefit by working with companies to improve their positive impact of business in society.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)

Recycling Policy Section
4th Floor, 151 Buckingham Palace Road
London SW1W 9SS
t 020 7215 1036 f 020 7215 5835
<http://www.dti.gov.uk/support/good1.htm>
See the related link for the DTI's IT refurbishers directory.

EMAS (Eco-Management and Auditing Scheme)

<http://www.emas.org.uk/>
EMAS - the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme, is a voluntary initiative designed to improve companies' environmental performance

Envirowise

t 0800 585794
<http://www.envirowise.gov.uk/>
Envirowise offers UK businesses free, independent, confidential advice and support on practical ways to increase profits, minimise waste and reduce environmental impact.

Furniture Industry Research Association (FIRA)

Maxwell Road
Stevenage
Hertfordshire SG1 2EW
t 01438 777700 f 01438 777800

fps@dma.org.uk
<http://www.fpsonline.org.uk>

Furniture Re-use Network (FRN)

48 -54 West St
St Phillips
Bristol. BS2 OBL
t 0117 954 3571 f 0117 954 3570
<http://www.frn.org.uk/>

The Furniture Re-use Network (FRN), established in 1989, is the national co-ordinating body for furniture recycling schemes that collect redundant furniture for redistribution to people in need.

Independent Waste Paper Processors Association

19, High Street, Daventry, Northants, NN11 4BG
t 01327 703 223 f 01327 300 612
admin@iwppa.co.uk
<http://www.iwppa.co.uk>

Video available to buy or hire. Free booklet "Waste Paper - Time for Appraisal".

National Association of Paper Merchants

Hamilton Court, Gogmore Lane, Chertsey, Surrey, KT16 9AP
t 08707 500249 f 01932 569749
info@napm.org.uk
<http://www.namp.org.uk>

The NAPM has been the accredited Trade Association for paper and board wholesalers for over 75 years.

PaperChain

Papermakers House, Rivenhall Road, Westlea, Swindon, Wiltshire SN5 7BD
t 01793 889 600
<http://www.paperchain2000.org.uk>

PaperChain, launched in 1995, is an ongoing campaign sponsored by members of The Paper Federation of Great Britain that rely on recovered paper as their primary raw material. It aims to increase the amount of paper recycled in the UK and to ensure that UK paper manufacturers have a consistent and competitively priced supply of high quality recovered paper.

The Mailing Preference Service

FREEPOST 22
London W1E 7EZ
t 020 7766 4410 f 020 7974 1886
Contact to have your name removed from mailing lists.

<http://www.fira.co.uk>

In Kind Direct

19 Milk Street London EC2V 8AN
t 020 7860 5930 f 020 7860 5920
media@inkinddirect.org
<http://www.inkinddirect.org/>

A clearing house for surplus goods from the corporate sector, mainly manufacturers and retailers, channelling them to good causes in the voluntary sector.

Industry Council for Electronic Equipment Recycling (ICER)

6 Bath Place
Rivington Street
London, EC2A 3JE.
t 020 7729 4766
<http://www.icer.org.uk>

Working to develop long-term strategies to manage and minimise waste from electronic and electrical equipment. Holds directory of commercial recyclers, and information on WEEE policy.

OGCbuying.solutions

Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2BY
t 020 7271 2910 f 020 7271 2920
<http://www.ogcbuying.solutions.gov.uk>
Enquiries line: 0870 268 2222

OGCbuying.solutions is an Executive Agency of the Office of Government Commerce in the Treasury is a dedicated procurement service for central government and the wider public sector.

Save-a-Cup Recycling Co

Suite 2, Bridge House, Bridge Street
High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2EL
t 01494 510 167
hq@save-a-cup.co.uk
<http://www.save-a-cup.co.uk>

Offers a free collection and recycling service for vending machine cups

UK Cartridge Recyclers Association (UKCRA)

19B School Road, Sale, Manchester M33 7XX
t 01706 525050 f 01706 647440,
info@ukcra.com
<http://www.ukcra.com>

Trade association. Members must have attained standards for toner cartridge recycling established by the association. Maintains list of companies which have reached and maintained these standards.

Useful publications

Paper

The Paper Federation of Great Britain, Why waste paper?

PaperChain, 2001, The role of business in recycling

Confederation of Paper industries/PaperChain, Factsheet: Recovery and recycling of paper and board

WEEE

DTI, Unwanted Computer Equipment: A guide to reuse 2000, URN 00/785. A free publication call 0870 1502 500 to order

DTI, Unwanted White Goods: A guide to reuse, 1999, URN 00/785. A free publication call 0870 1502 500 to order ICER, UK Status Report on Waste from Electronic and Electrical Equipment, 2000

The Furniture Recycling Network, Electrical Appliance Re-use Technical Manual, 2001. To obtain a copy, call their information line on 01924 375 252

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<http://www.wasteonline.org.uk>

<http://www.wastewatch.org.uk>

Due to changes in funding, we are no longer able to offer a public information service. Should you have further questions on waste and recycling, please contact one of these groups:

Householders and students should call the [Recycle Now](#) helpline on 0845 331 31 31 for further waste based information, and where to find your local recycling facilities.

Small to medium businesses should visit the [Envirowise](#) website, or call 0800 585 794, for further information on waste issues. Larger businesses should visit www.businesslink.gov.uk.

For industry based questions, please use the WRAP technical helpline on 0808 100 2040 for advice on markets and recycling company development, or visit www.letsrecycle.com for listings of recyclers and reprocessors.

If you find a mistake on this page, or have a technical question regarding the wasteonline website, please email info@wastewatch.org.uk.

Thank you, and apologies for any inconvenience.