

Wood recycling information sheet



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It is estimated that 1.6 billion cubic metres (m³) of timber is harvested worldwide¹. Of this approximately 50 million m³ is used in the UK annually.²

In 2004 the UK production of timber was 11.1 million m³, and production is forecast to increase to over 16 million m³ by 2020.³ More than two thirds of the timber we use in the UK is imported, and most of these imports are softwood from Scandinavia and the Baltic States. Most of the softwood is used for construction. Most of the hardwoods we use are for furniture and interior design, are imported from Eastern and Western European countries as well as North America. Tropical wood is also imported and is used for marine construction and high value interiors⁴.

It is estimated that each year up to 420,000 tonnes of waste wood is produced by households, or deposited at civic amenity sites in the UK. Packaging (pallets and crates) produce a further 670,000 tonnes, and construction and demolition 750,000 tonnes.⁵

Sources of timber and sustainable forestry - there is some debate on the sources of wood. Whilst this sheet will concentrate on the reuse and recycling and final disposal of timber and timber products, there does need to be some recognition that there are still reports⁶ of illegally logged timber entering the UK, and being supplied through timber merchants.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a non-governmental organisation "dedicated to promoting responsible management of the world's forests"; they are working to combat both illegal, unethical, and environmentally damaging logging practices, and are widely acknowledged as the standard, as endorsed by Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, the Woodland Trust and the WWF.⁷



If buying new timber, look out for the FSC mark, and if your chosen supplier doesn't have it - ask why not, and if they would be prepared to stock it.

Paper usage - a large proportion, 48%⁸ of timber used in the UK is used as the basis for the production of paper. For more information on paper recycling, please visit our paper [information sheet](#).

Figures on the disposal of wood waste are scarce, and at best, are often estimates rather than systematically recorded examples. As such, any figures stated will always have some element of error and should not be taken as an exact record.

¹ <http://www.newbuilder.co.uk/archive/forestry.asp>

² <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/ahen-5gbls4>

³ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/ahen-5gbls4>

⁴ <http://www.forestsforever.org.uk/sustainability/uk/>

⁵ Recycling World Magazine July 28 2000 pg 16

⁶ <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/MultimediaFiles/Live/FullReport/6249.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.fsc-uk.info/about.asp>

⁸ Friends of the Earth 1995 - taken from An introduction to wood waste in the UK - Fauna and Flora International

Why bother?

The Earth Summit in June 1992 recognised that the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, especially the excessively high consumption of wood and paper products in the “developed” world, was a major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment. One of the outcomes of the Earth Summit was the non-legally binding “Authoritative Statement of Principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests”. Unfortunately, the Statement of Principles was not legally binding and did very little, if anything at all for the conservation of forests worldwide. Please click on the link in useful contacts below to see the Statement of Principles in full.

In 1999 global production of industrial wood and fuel wood reached 3,335 million m³,⁹ and is predicted to increase. Although in some areas, for example the UK, forests are actually increasing in size, globally there is a net reduction in forested area. During the 1990s the net reduction was nearly 10 million ha a year.¹⁰

The UK currently consumes about 3% the world's wood consumption. The UK has only about 1% of the world's population, but has three times the world's average per capita consumption rate of wood.¹¹ Although UK production of wood is expected to increase to 15 million m³ in 2020,¹² if we are only to use our fair share of global sustainable production, the UK will have to reduce its consumption of primary wood products by 70% by 2050.¹³

Although wood is only 5% of the average household waste, wood waste has some features that mean it should not be ignored;

1. it is biodegradable, and so can contribute to greenhouse gas production if allowed to rot in landfill sites. This makes it subject to the EU Landfill Directive, which stipulates that an increasing percentage of biological municipal waste must be diverted from landfill. For more information see the “What does the law say” section below.
2. often, it is in excellent condition, and would therefore make ideal material for reuse, rather than simply "being binned"
3. the growing, harvesting and processing of virgin timber uses energy and water, thereby using other natural resources which are not as renewable as timber
4. disposal costs: of more relevance to the commercial sector, but as with any other waste material, reusing or recycling will eventually save a company money as the cost of disposing through landfill rises

9 FAO, State of the Worlds Forests 2001, in Forest Goods and Services

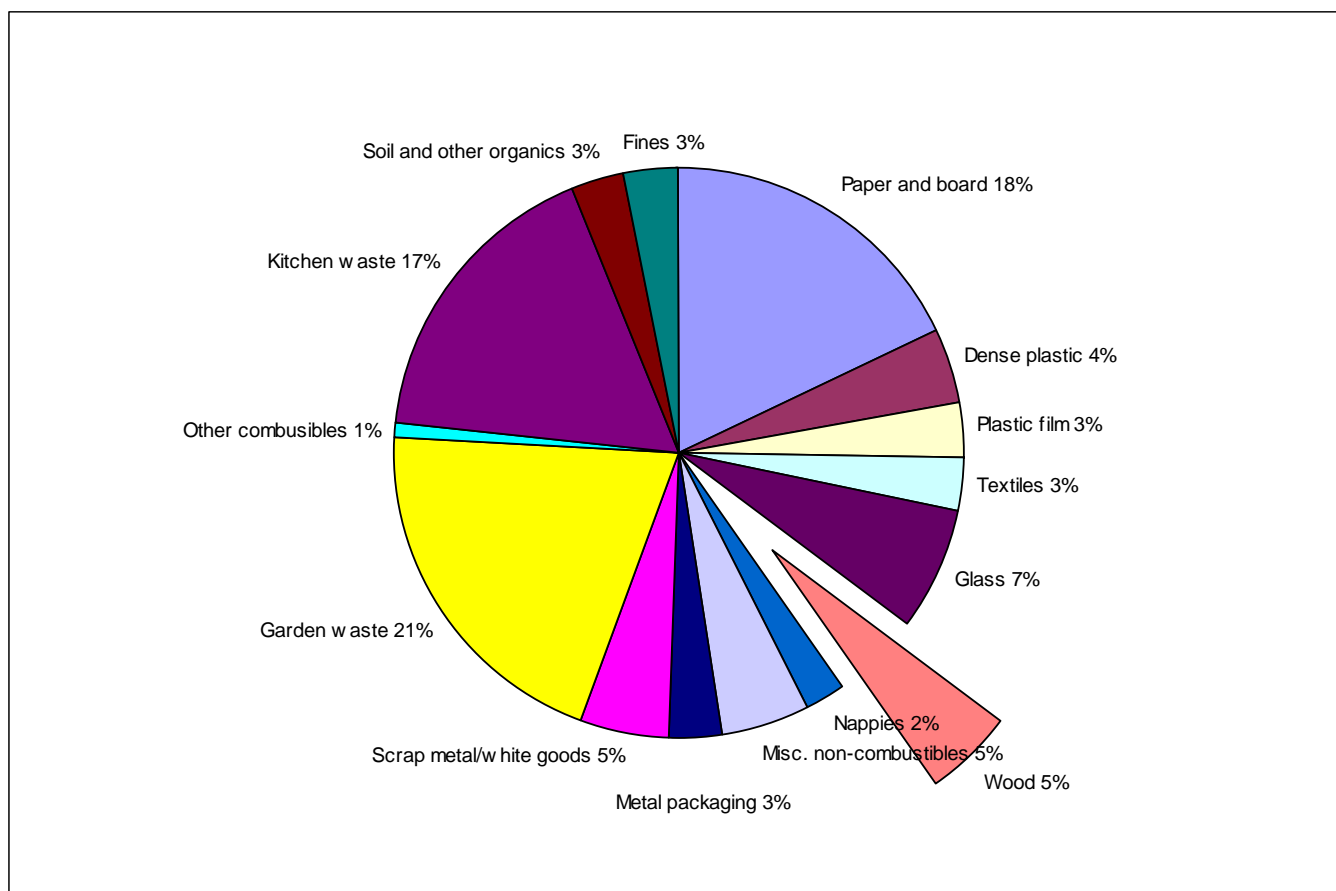
10 FAO State of the worlds forests 2001, the status of forest resources

11 FoE The UK's Footprint. 2000 pp2

12 www.forestry.gov.uk

13 FoE UK's Footprint 2000 pp2

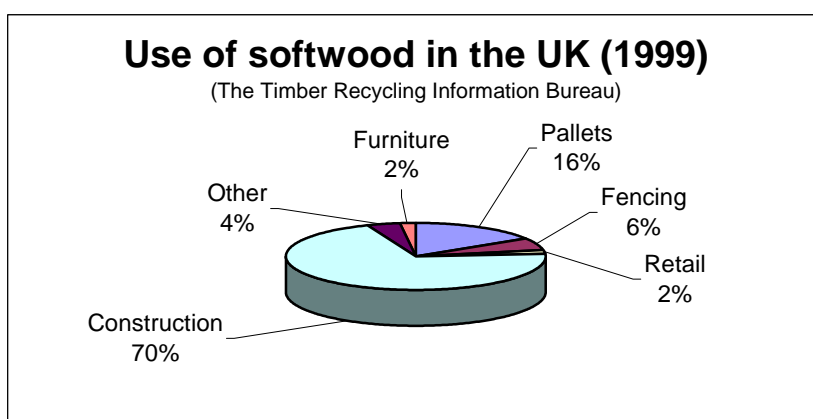
Household waste composition



Source: Analysis of household waste composition and factors driving waste increases - Dr. J. Parfitt, WRAP, December 2002

How's, what's and where's of recycling wood

Use of wood is highly dependent on its type and quality; better grades of wood are put to use in a variety of ways from



joinery to carcassing for furniture, while lower grades of wood are used for packaging and fencing material.

Softwoods are preferred to hardwoods when a cheap, strong and light wood is required, or when appearance is less important because the wood will be painted.

Hardwoods, especially temperate hardwoods, are quite hard and durable. Tropical hardwoods are chosen for their physical and aesthetic qualities, and their fine-grained and defect-free appearance makes them ideal for fine machining and crafting.

Wood waste generated by householders comes mainly from old furniture, fencing, and DIY off cuts, very little comes from wood packaging. Details of waste arisings vary with different groups, with estimates suggesting that householder production ranges from 420,000¹⁴ tonnes per year, to 1.6 million¹⁵ tonnes a year. In all cases the consensus is that the majority of wood waste is disposed through civic amenity sites.

Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) is difficult to recycle and it is estimated that currently 1 million tonnes of waste MDF is generated each year by the furniture industry. Trada Technology's Fibresolve project is the first processor able to reprocess coated MDF and particleboard. (Trada 2001)

Reduce - do you actually need that timber in the first place? When purchasing, not only check the source of the wood you are buying, but also consider the product's durability. Less frequent purchasing will ultimately lead to less waste.

Reuse - there are now many opportunities to reuse timber. Architectural salvage groups are dotted around the country, and will often have supplies of floor boards, window and door frames, or the doors themselves, and even staircases for example. Check with SALVO (see contacts) for your nearest centre. Often large construction projects, such as the Eden Project, are taking their use and disposal of timber into consideration, and are trying to find more sustainable solutions.

If unwanted wooden furniture is still in good condition, then a furniture reuse project may be interested in collecting it (see further contacts), so that it can be passed on to people on low incomes for reuse.

Recycling - If the three options above are not viable then unwanted timber should be recycled. In the first instance you should contact your local authority to see what facilities they are providing for householders. They may also be aware of any local wood reuse projects operating in your locality. Although still relatively rare, these groups are starting to become more popular and can make use of good quality timber. Please see the [contact section](#) for further details of RecycleWood, a website providing a searchable database of wood recycling facilities for householders and companies.

Wood that is not of a quality to be reused as reclaimed timber can be recycled into the following:

Mulch – can be used to prevent soil erosion, enrich soils, help limit water loss and moderate soil temperature change.

Composting Agent – sawdust and chipped wood can be used as a bulking agent to improve air flow and decomposition.

Pet Bedding/Equestrian Surfacing - Untreated material can be used for pet bedding, and can also be used in all weather exercise rings for horses.

Chipboard and Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) – these are produced by mixing chipped wood with a resin and applying heat and / or pressure to form a board.

Fuel - timber fired boilers

There is little scope for the recycling of domestic wood waste. While companies exist for the collection and reuse/recycling of pallets and crates for example, there are no such facilities for household waste.

Disposal - incineration, landfill

Buying wood

If you are buying new timber for a project, or even specifying timber for construction, please consider using the Friends of the Earth guide below:

Good wood guide checklist

Make the best environmental choice when buying or using wood. Start with **step 1 - the best option** - and work your way through.

1. **Repair, restore or adapt something you already have.** You may need professional help but it could still be cheaper than something new and it's far better for the world's forests.
2. **Buy second-hand, recycled, reclaimed or waste timber.** A better environmental choice than buying new.

14 Recycling World Magazine July 28 2000 pp16

15 WRAP business plan working paper - wood Feb 2001

3. **Buy locally produced timber products that are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified.** If you can't recycle, buying locally-produced timber products means less fossil fuel is used in transportation. All FSC certified wood carries the FSC logo.
4. **Buy FSC certified products from farther afield.** If there is no timber available from a locally certified forest, the FSC logo is always preferable.

(Taken from the Friends of the Earth Good Wood Guide)¹⁶

What does the law say?

For full details of waste legislation please see our [legislation information sheet](#).

At present there are two pieces of legislation that have an impact on timber disposal and resources available, however neither of these pieces directly target wood used by householders.

The Landfill Directive restricts the quantity of biodegradable waste entering landfill, as a means to reduce green house gas emissions (when decomposing in landfills, waste such as food waste and garden waste give off methane). Whilst timber is not targeted directly, it is a constituent of household waste, and as such is covered by the directive.

The Packaging Directive restricts the amount of timber used in packaging - for example pallets and packing crates - that can be disposed of either to landfill or incineration without energy recovery. The directive sets recycling and recovery targets for the quantity of wood used for packaging in the UK. This directive directly affects companies with a turnover of more than £2 million, or who process more than 5 tonnes of packaging, a year.

Useful contacts

Brighton and Hove Wood Recycling Project

Unit 32-36
Municipal Market
Circus Street
Brighton BN2 9QF
t 01273 570 500

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

Reuse and recover timber to reduce waste.

Forests Forever

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

Campaign site of the Timber Trade Federation

The UN Authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests

www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-3annex3.htm

Forestry Commission

231 Corstorphine Road,
Edinburgh,
EH12 7AT
t 0845 3673787

enquiries@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk>

Information on British production of wood.

Construction Industry Environmental Forum (CIEF)

6 Storey's Gate,
London
SW1P 3AU
t 020 7222 8891

enquiries@ciria.org.uk

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

Helps companies involved in construction to improve their environmental and sustainable performance.

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Room 8, 11-13 Great Oak Street
Llanidloes
Powys
SY18 6BU

t 01686 413916 f 01686 412176

<http://www.fsc-uk.info>

info@fsc-uk.org

Manages a forest certification and product labelling scheme to identify wood from well managed forests

Friends of the Earth Good Wood Guide

http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/biodiversity/resource/good_wood_guide/

¹⁶ http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/biodiversity/resource/good_wood_guide/wood_timber_buying_guide.html

Furniture Reuse Network

FRN c/o CFS,
The Old Drill Hall,
17a Vicarage Street North Wakefield,
WF1 4JS
t 01924 375252
furniture.rn@virgin.net
<http://www.frn.org.uk>

Promotes the reuse of unwanted furniture. Central contact for Furniture Re-use Projects around the country.

National Community Wood Recycling Project

National Community Wood Recycling Project
Premier House
Shoreham Airport
West Sussex
BN43 5FF
Tel: 01273 46 56 66
Fax: 01273 46 56 16
email: info@communitywoodrecycling.org.uk
A site promoting the setting up and support of wood recycling projects.

RecycleWood

The Old Academy,
21 Horse Fair
Banbury Oxon,
OX4 0AH
t 0808 100 2040
f 01295 819 911
helpline@wrap.org.uk
<http://www.recyclewood.org.uk>
Search for your nearest wood recycler and find information about products made from recycled wood.

Timber Recycling Information Centre

<http://www.recycle-it.org/>
For information on all aspects of timber recycling

TRADA (The Timber Research and Development Association) Technology

Stocking Lane
Hughenden Valley
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire HP14 4ND
t 01494 569600
<http://www.trada.co.uk>
Maintains active programmes of research and information on timber and wood products.

Leaside Wood Recycling Project

LWRP
Bromley-By-Bow Centre,
St Leonard's Street
E3 3BT
t 07867 855 115
info@lwrp.org.uk
<http://www.lwrp.org.uk>
Non profit company that salvage and reuse Timber in the Leaside area.

PalletLink

Clare House
Pinewood Road
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire HP12 4DA
t 01494 558 282
info@palletlink.co.uk
<http://www.palletlink.co.uk>
Provide technical help to pallet and box manufacturers and can provide details of companies involved in pallet repair and recycling.

Salvo

PO BOX 333
Cornhill-on-Tweed
TD12 4YJ
t 01890 820 333
tk@salvoweb.com
<http://www.salvo.co.uk>
Provides a Salvo Pack (£5.75) giving detailed listings of all known sources of architectural and reclaimed building materials in all regions of the UK.

Timber Trade Federation

<http://www.ttf.co.uk>
Information on sustainable timber and educational resources.

Wood Recyclers' Association

16 High Street
Brampton
Huntingdon
Cambs PE28 4TU
t 01480 455249
f 01480 453680
<http://www.woodrecyclers.org>
wood@recyclemetals.org

Updated: January 06

<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.