



FOCUS ON... Reduce, Recycle and Reuse Projects and Initiatives

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This paper explores the different initiatives being adopted by individuals, communities and businesses operating within the waste and resource management industry to promote the ideas of reduce, recycle and reuse.

Introduction

The UK generates an estimated 434 million tonnes of waste every year – 1.6% lower than the figures reported in 2008 (Defra, 2011).

This reduction has occurred due to increased recognition from households, businesses and the Government that reducing the amount of waste society sends to landfill saves valuable resources and reduces pollution as recycled materials use much less energy than producing new materials.

It is therefore unsurprising that the economic value of diverting waste materials (such as paper, food, aluminium, glass, plastics, wood and textiles) away from landfill has been recognised by the Government as an important approach for improving environmental and economic outcomes (Energy and Utility Skills, 2013).

UK employers are predicted to save £22 billion annually by cutting out wasteful practices through a commitment to recycling

and reducing the amount of waste they send to landfill. The concepts of reducing, recycling and reusing are aspects of the waste hierarchy which classifies waste management options in order of their environmental impact.

The hierarchy is outlined by the waste framework directive which must be taken into account when making policy decisions related to waste, infrastructure and management (letsrecycle.com, 2011). The directive also identifies targets for increasing rates of recycling and reuse for household, construction and demolition (Lets Recycle, 2011). For example:

- To recycle and prepare for reuse 50% of household waste by 2020.
- To reuse, recycle or recover 70% of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste by 2020.

However, ESA (2013) argue that demand for recycled products remains low as a result of retailers and the public failing to identify a need for recycled products. Furthermore, while a significant proportion of recycling takes place, the composition of some materials with the potential to be recycled does not make the process cost effective.



Reduce



Reducing the amount of waste that is initially produced by businesses or households is the key to cutting the proportion of waste sent to landfill.

This reduction is starting to take place in supply chains as businesses of all sizes adopt sustainable procurement practices to prevent waste and reduce the costs associated with new resources by including environmental, economic and social criteria in contracts.

Packaging waste

European legislation is also driving the reduction of waste across the UK – for example, the packaging and packaging waste directive aims to reduce the impacts of packaging on the environment by discouraging the production of excess packaging and reducing the amount of waste through recycling or reuse (BIS, 2012).

This is extremely important as recent figures suggest that plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays represent more than 70% of the plastic packaging collected for recycling in the UK (Francavilla, 2013).

Food waste

Reducing the amount of food waste produced by supermarkets and restaurants has also become more high profile in recent years as up to 2 billion tonnes of food is wasted every year – accounting for between 30% and 50% of all the food produced around the world.

Many argue that a significant proportion of food waste in the UK is cultural, caused by unrealistic use-by dates or related to the fact that supermarkets [and, to a certain degree, consumers] demand cosmetically perfect food. Another factor is the buy-one-get-one-free offers which can encourage volume purchase and potential waste.

Minimising food waste will require greater cooperation between industry leading professional bodies, individual businesses and their supply chains. Some supermarkets have already started working with their suppliers to achieve zero waste.

For example, Asda unveiled plans earlier this year to send surplus food to local food banks, rather than returning excess stock back to manufacturers that will often dispose of it in landfills.

Recycle



Recycling is the process of changing waste materials into new products that reduce the consumption of natural resources, save energy, cut pollution and contribute to the creation of sustainable jobs for the future.

Evidence suggests that recycling rates for households across the UK increased to 39% in 2010 despite starting at a low base in 2001 when recycling rates were just 12%. As a result, UK recycling rates rose faster than any other country in the Europe during the past decade (Vaughn, 2013).

This increase in recycling activity has mainly been driven by EU directives – for example, the waste framework directive sets out targets for increasing recycling rates for

households, as well as the construction and demolition industries.

In addition, the landfill directive set the UK a target of reducing the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill by 35% in 2020 and failure to meet this target could lead to fines of up to £1 million a day (letsrecycle.com, 2010).

Recycling in the community

Local authorities and councils are responsible for driving recycling initiatives within the local community.

This will often involve fortnightly collections of household recycling (such as paper, plastics, food waste or garden waste), maintaining community recycling banks for coloured/plain glass, batteries or clothing and implementing recycling awareness/education programmes within the local community and local schools to promote the benefits of recycling.

In addition, WRAP (2013) provide supporting information on what can be recycled, how the process works and provides a search function allowing communities to find their nearest recycling banks.

For further information on this initiative visit: <http://www.recyclenow.com/>.

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Reuse

Reuse is the idea that materials can be used repeatedly, rather than used once and thrown away. This ensures that materials remain outside the waste stream, saves money in purchasing and disposal costs, reduces strain on resources, reduces pollution and generates new business opportunities.

Gover (2013) argues that the key to extracting greater value from waste, particularly textiles, furniture, electrical and electronic goods, is to design innovative products that are durable, repairable and can be broken down easily so that their component parts can be reused in other products.

Evidence suggests that the economic benefits of this approach could be significant – for example, around 100,000 washing machines (3%) are reused each year in the UK, generating £400,000 in net revenue to reuse organisations (Gover, 2013).

Reuse can be accomplished using a range of methods including: using durable products, borrowing, renting, donating and buying from charities or second hand retailers.

Reuse in the community

Local community groups, small businesses and charities are undertaking a variety of reuse projects designed to find unwanted items (such as clothes, furniture, bicycles, large appliances and small items of electrical

equipment) a new home to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill.

These services will usually accept unwanted items in good condition or in need of minor repair with the intention to resell them. Some groups offer collection services, as well as rubbish removal services for a small fee to facilitate full house clearance or the removal of large furnishings.

In addition, some businesses will pay potential sellers for high value items, particularly electrical goods or furnishings that can be resold at a higher price.

An example of such as a reuse programme is run by Western Riverside Waste Authority (2013). The Authority have started the Rework project which is a reuse workshop designed to repair good quality, reusable items and sell them to members of the local community. It is estimated that the Rework programme will save 1,200 tonnes of material from landfill and will save 6,250 tonnes of CO₂ every year.

Furthermore, the programme will give back to the community by helping up to 60 young people on long-term Jobseeker's Allowance to undertake training that will allow them to develop knowledge and skills suitable for the workplace.

For further information on this project visit: http://www.wrwa.gov.uk/reuse/rework_workshop.aspx.



WAMITAB's Role

WAMITAB is a charity and leading awarding organisation for the waste and resource management; recycling; cleaning; and facilities management industries. Since 1989 WAMITAB have worked directly with industry leaders to shape and deliver employer led qualifications that provide individuals with the qualifications to work.

Our values are underpinned by the desire to see every individual being given the opportunity to learn. By qualifying the workforce, we aim to embed a culture of a safe and attractive place to work and do business.

We have developed a series of qualifications designed to support reduce, recycling and reuse activities within community groups, businesses and charities, including:

- Level 1 Award in Waste and Recycling
- Level 1 Diploma for General Recycling Operative
- Level 2 Diploma in Sustainable Recycling Activities
- Level 3 Diploma for Sustainable Recycling Activities (supervisory)
- Level 4 Diploma for Sustainable Recycling Activities

Find out more at www.wamitab.org.uk, email info.admin@wamitab.org.uk or follow us on Twitter [@WAMITAB](https://twitter.com/WAMITAB).

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This paper has been written and produced by the Project Team at WAMITAB.

