





# RECYCLING

## not just a load of rubbish

The UK has some of the worst recycling rates in the Western world. So what are we doing wrong – and how can we improve?

The UK is in danger of reaching waste crisis point. We produce more than 30 million tonnes of household waste each year, and disposing of it is a huge problem. In theory, three quarters of household waste could be recycled or composted – but almost 80 per cent is sent to landfill.

UK recycling figures are pitiful – England recycles 11 per cent of its household rubbish (and figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are even worse). Yet Switzerland, Austria and Germany recycle around half their waste, and parts of the US and Canada top 70 per cent.

Central government, local councils

and individuals need to work together to reduce the amount of rubbish we produce and improve our recycling rates. As the league tables opposite show, many areas of the country have a long way to go.

The two alternatives to recycling are both harmful to the environment. Incineration creates polluting emissions and toxic ash, which then has to be buried in landfills. But landfill space is fast running out, and there are concerns about the effects of these sites on human health and the environment.

Landfilled rubbish produces methane, a greenhouse gas, which can build up and cause explosions. Chemicals and bacteria can also leak into the soil and the water table.

The government has started to tackle these problems in recent years. Landfill Tax was introduced in 1996, levied on the amount of rubbish sent to landfills. More recently, the European Union Landfill Directive set targets for the rubbish sent to landfill. Countries that fail to meet these targets face hefty fines – amounting to as much as £500,000 a day in the UK.

The Waste Strategy, published in 2000, set out plans to reduce and recycle waste in England and Wales. (Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own similar strategies.) The strategy set targets of 25 per cent of household waste to be recycled or composted by 2005, rising to 30 per cent by 2010 and 33 per cent by 2015.

### THE COUNCIL'S ROLE

Martyn Cole is a recycling officer at Eastleigh Borough Council, which has one of the highest recycling rates in the country.

Households in Eastleigh are given two wheelie bins – a green one for dry recyclables (such as paper, plastic bottles, food and drinks cans) and a grey one for other waste. Bins are collected and emptied on alternate weeks – grey one week and green the next.

There are also recycling banks throughout the area, where glass and textiles can also be taken.

Part of Martyn's job is to raise awareness among residents. 'It's important to let people know what's happening in their area and what they can do to help,' he says.



### THE INDIVIDUAL'S ROLE

Sarah Kissack lives in Stoke Newington, north London, with partner Steve and four-year-old daughter Ailish. Her local council, Hackney, recycles just 2 per cent of household waste.

Hackney is piloting doorstep paper collection in some areas, including Sarah's. But Sarah has no other doorstep recycling collections – she has to rely on recycling banks to recycle the family's glass and cans. Sarah doesn't have a car so she uses a rucksack to carry this to the local bank. But she says this is often vandalised or overflowing.

Hackney Council says that it would like to recycle more but that it lacks money and space – all materials for recycling have to be taken outside the borough.



### COUNCILS COMPARED

There are more than 400 local authorities in England and Wales, including borough councils, county councils, district councils and unitary authorities. To see which ones are doing best in the household recycling stakes, we've divided them into three groups: those councils that only collect waste, those that only dispose of it, and those that do both.

The league tables on this page show the percentage of household waste recycled or composted by the best- and worst-performing authorities in each group. We haven't included figures for Scotland or Northern Ireland, because they collect recycling information in a different way, and the figures can't be compared with those for England and Wales.

If your local council isn't in any of the league tables, and you'd like to see how well it has been doing, there is a full list of council recycling rates for England and Wales online at [www.which.net/which](http://www.which.net/which).

As the league tables show, recycling rates vary enormously, though some councils argue that they face particular financial or social problems, which affect how much recycling they can do. Unitary Authorities are more or less solely responsible for improving their own figures, but in other parts of the country, the disposal authorities and the collection authorities need to work together to improve recycling rates.

KEY			
LB	London borough	BC	Borough council
DC	District council	CC	County council
MBC	Metropolitan borough council	WA	Waste authority

### UNITARY AUTHORITIES (COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL)

Bath and NE Somerset	21%	BEST
Isle of Wight	20%	
Poole BC	20%	
Bournemouth BC	19%	
Bexley LB	18%	
Kingston-upon-Thames LB	18%	
Peterborough City	18%	
Stockport MBC	18%	
Average of 117 authorities <sup>1</sup>	6%	
Halton BC	2%	
Knowsley MBC	2%	
Liverpool City	2%	
Trafford MBC	2%	
Wigan MBC	2%	
Manchester MBC	1%	
Middlesbrough BC	1%	
St Helens MBC	1%	
Sunderland City	1%	
Corporation of London	0%	WORST

<sup>1</sup> Including 95 authorities in England and 22 councils in Wales

### WASTE DISPOSAL AUTHORITIES

Dorset CC	29%	BEST
Hampshire CC	24%	
Buckinghamshire CC	19%	
Cambridgeshire CC	18%	
Devon CC	17%	
Surrey CC	17%	
Essex CC	16%	
West Sussex CC	16%	
Worcestershire CC	16%	
Suffolk CC	15%	
Average of 39 authorities	12%	
Bedfordshire CC	7%	
Cornwall CC	7%	
Cumbria CC	7%	
North London WA <sup>1</sup>	7%	
North Yorkshire CC	7%	
Merseyside MBC	5%	
Durham CC	4%	
Northumberland CC	4%	
East London WA <sup>2</sup>	3%	WORST

<sup>1</sup> Disposes of waste for the London boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Islington and Waltham Forest <sup>2</sup> Disposes of waste for the London boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham and Redbridge

### WASTE COLLECTION AUTHORITIES

Daventry DC	35%	BEST
Eastleigh BC	32%	
Reigate and Banstead BC	31%	
Chiltern DC	27%	
Forest Heath DC	27%	
Melton BC	24%	
Lichfield DC	23%	
New Forest DC	23%	
St Edmundsbury BC	23%	
Average of 260 authorities	8%	
Blyth Valley BC	2%	
Burnley BC	2%	
Cannock Chase Council	2%	
Caradon DC	2%	
Chester-le-Street DC	2%	
Hackney LB	2%	
Islington LB	2%	
Newham LB	2%	
Mansfield DC	2%	
North Cornwall DC	2%	
Sedgefield BC	2%	
Ashfield DC	1%	
Wansbeck BC	1%	
Corby BC	0%	WORST

## RUBBISH REBORN

It's not just councils that must lift their game. It's important for individuals to take responsibility for the rubbish they produce. With each household in the UK producing a tonne of waste each year, choosing to reduce, reuse and recycle yours can make a real difference. Here's what happens to five common items of household rubbish if they're recycled... or thrown in the bin.

### GLASS BOTTLE

#### In the bin

Every day, 14 million bottles and jars are buried in landfills. Here, a glass bottle will take more than a million years to degrade.

#### Recycled

Glass can be recycled indefinitely. Recycling glass uses less energy

than making new glass, reduces pollution and saves valuable materials having to be quarried. Products that can be made from recycled glass include road surfacing, water filters, paving tiles, kitchen surfaces and, of course, more glass.



### PLASTIC BOTTLE

#### In the bin

A plastic bottle will take around 450 years to degrade in a landfill. Plastics are made from oil – a valuable non-renewable resource.

#### Recycled

The six most

common types of plastic can all be easily recycled. Recycled plastic can be used for many things – compost bins, recycling containers, furniture, pens, bags – even fleeces.



### PAPER

#### In the bin

If landfilled, a single bus ticket takes a year to degrade. The paper used for UK newspapers in just one year would wrap around the earth 270 times.

#### Recycled

Paper can be recycled up to seven times. Every tonne of paper recycled saves 17 trees and 7,000 gallons of water. And it uses less electricity and creates fewer emissions than making new paper.

Products that can be made from recycled paper include pens, stationery, folding seats, towels, animal bedding, bags, calendars, photo frames and coffins.

### ALUMINIUM DRINK CAN

#### In the bin

Landfilled aluminium cans take around 50 years to degrade – and three billion of them were sent to landfill in 2000.

#### Recycled

Aluminium can be recycled indefinitely. Recycling aluminium uses 95 per cent less energy than making new aluminium, and reduces emissions by 99 per cent.

Aluminium has the highest value of any recyclable packaging material, so it's popular with fundraisers who can swap large quantities of cans for cash.



### STEEL FOOD CAN

#### In the bin

More than 400,000 tonnes of steel cans are landfilled in the UK each year. They take at least 50 years to degrade.

#### Recycled

Steel is the world's most recycled metal – steel cans are one of the easiest things to separate out for recycling, because they are magnetic.

Recycling steel saves natural resources such as iron ore, coal and water. It also reduces emissions and energy used in the extraction, transportation and transformation of these materials.

Products that can be made from recycled steel include scissors, furniture, cutlery, jewellery, paperclips and other cans.

## A LESS WASTEFUL FUTURE

For the UK to make real progress in recycling, we all need to make a commitment to change, and accept that reducing and recycling waste is a necessity.

Some countries, such as the US and Germany, have taken radical steps to reduce household waste. People there are charged according to the amount of waste they produce, which has reduced waste and increased recycling rates dramatically. There would need to be a change in the law for this to happen in the UK.

Friends of the Earth is campaigning for doorstep recycling to be made compulsory for all councils by 2010. *Which?* supports this campaign and we would like to see all consumers given access to doorstep recycling facilities.

If your council doesn't offer doorstep recycling, you can write to your MP and your council to tell them that you think it should – public demand can make a difference.

In March the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announced a £177 million fund to help councils in England and Wales improve their recycling facilities.

Last month, the National Waste Awareness Initiative launched 'Rethink rubbish', the first national campaign to encourage people to reduce, re-use and recycle their household waste.

These are all steps in the right direction, but there's still a long way to go.

### FACT SHEET

If you'd like to know more about what you can do to recycle more, and where to find out more about playing your part in reducing waste, we have a free factsheet, with tips and advice on recycling. It's online at [www.which.net/which](http://www.which.net/which). Alternatively, call **0845 307 4000** and ask for a copy (quoting code RECTIP).