

Waste and recycling

MEA factsheet #1g



We are sending increasing amounts to landfill, both here in the UK and worldwide. However, most of what we class as waste could be used again by someone else. Reusing or recycling waste brings many benefits, including helping to hold back climate change. This is because less energy is needed to reuse or recycle materials than is needed to mine or harvest raw materials; less energy means less greenhouse gases and less climate change. Read on for more details of the link between waste and climate change and what can be done about it.

Waste and climate change

Overproduction

Making so much new stuff to replace what we throw away is using up the world's valuable natural resources. Every time raw natural resources are extracted, fuel and energy are used, releasing greenhouse gases.

Bad practice

Many manufacturing processes aren't as energy efficient as they could be, increasing the contribution our stuff makes to climate change. Transporting goods around the world between different factories and shops adds to the problem. Products often aren't made to last so they need replacing more often.

Excessive disposal

The average person in the UK throws out around 1.6 tonnes of rubbish per year (DEFRA, 2009). Much of this could be reused or recycled, reducing our impact on climate change and preserving natural resources.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Tackle the problems through recycling and waste reduction

Why recycle?

Anything we don't recycle is either dumped in landfill sites or burnt in incinerators, both of which add to climate change and cause a number of other problems.

The problem with landfill sites

- They release the greenhouse gases methane and carbon dioxide (CO₂) and so contribute to climate change.



- They release toxins. Rotting rubbish emits explosive gases and polluting liquids.
- They are smelly, unattractive, increase traffic, noise, litter and pests. No-one wants to live next to one, but it's becoming harder

The problem with incineration

- It can be used to generate energy, but inefficiently, with more greenhouse gases released than gas fired power stations.
- It wastes energy. Recycling saves far more energy than is generated by burning waste because it means making fewer new things from raw materials.
- It causes pollution - smoke, gases and ash from incinerators can contain harmful dioxins which are a cause of cancer.
- It encourages more waste - incinerators need a minimum of rubbish to operate.

Why waste it?

Most of what ends up in landfill and incinerators could be used again, saving huge amounts of energy, reducing waste and protecting our diminishing supplies of raw materials.

Paper

Demand for paper is putting immense pressure on the world's forests, destroying these fantastic carbon sinks. Set your printer to print on both sides of the paper, or re-use paper printed on just one side for scrap. Recycle paper and cardboard and buy recycled paper rather than paper made out of fresh forests!

Making a newspaper out of recycled waste paper produces 60% less carbon dioxide.



Food

We throw away a third of the food we buy, 60% of which is untouched (WRAP, 2008). Check regularly to see what needs using up. 'Use by' dates refer to food safety issues but 'best before' dates are only a guide to eating quality. Make the most of what's in your fridge and you will reduce your weekly shopping bill as well!

Kitchen and garden waste

Make your own organic compost from fruit and vegetable peelings, tea, coffee and garden waste. It reduces greenhouse gas emissions from landfill, and grows great plants too!

Plastic

Using recycled plastics saves energy and two tonnes of CO₂ emissions for every tonne of plastic recycled. It also saves oil, the raw material for plastics, which is becoming increasingly scarce. Plastic that isn't recycled takes hundreds of years to degrade in landfill or produces toxic smoke from incinerators. Recycle plastic wherever possible and avoid buying excessive packaging.



The energy saved by recycling one aluminium can will operate a TV set for 3 hours.

Metals

Two-thirds of wasted metal comes from steel or aluminium cans and foil. Recycling these is easy, profitable and saves energy and resources. Aluminium cans can be recycled indefinitely, saving 95 per cent of the energy needed to make them with raw materials.

If everyone was as wasteful as we are in the UK, we'd need 8 worlds to keep us going.

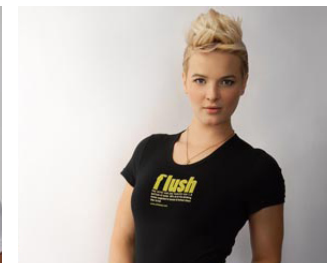


Glass

30 gallons of oil are saved for every tonne of glass which is recycled. For even greater energy savings and waste reduction, try reusing glass bottles or jars to store food or drink for example.

The rest

Many items can be re-used or recycled, saving energy, resources and landfill space. Maybe someone in your community could use something you might otherwise throw away - find out on your local freecycle site. Use local toy libraries or look in charity shops for furniture, clothes, books and much more. Look out for some of the new fashion collections using recycled fabrics. Many charities, schools and community groups recycle printer cartridges and mobile phones to raise funds. The possibilities are endless!



T-shirts made from recycled plastic bottles

Further information

www.wrap.org.uk

Information for individuals and organisations on reducing waste and increasing recycling

www.recycling-guide.org.uk

Information on where you can recycle in your area

www.recyclingappeal.com

Recycle phones and printer cartridges.

lovefoodhatewaste.com

Practical information and recipes

www.uk.freecycle.org

www.mea.org.uk
info@mea.org.uk

marches
energy agency 

Marches Energy Agency is a registered charity, number 1070942