

Fact sheet



**Friends of
the Earth**

EU Landfill Directive and Waste Strategy

The Landfill Problem

The UK currently produces 28 million tonnes of municipal waste every year – 83% of which ends up in landfill. Municipal waste includes all waste under the control of local authorities or agents acting on their behalf, and around 60% of the municipal waste stream is biodegradable. Biodegradable waste is mostly food waste, garden waste and paper, and this decays anaerobically in landfill sites to produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas. There are many other problems associated with landfill including leaching (the leaking of potentially toxic liquids into soil and groundwater), litter, pests and the waste of valuable, recyclable goods.

The production of household waste is suggested to be increasing at a rate of 3% per year, although much of this may be waste diverted from other sources (e.g. commercial waste) rather than “new” household waste.

EU Legislation

The EU Landfill Directive sets targets for the reduction of biodegradable waste sent to landfill as 75% of the 1995 level by 2010, 50% of the 1995 level by 2013 and 35% of the 1995 level by 2020. This means that by 2020 the UK only needs to divert 40 per cent of household waste from landfill to meet the legal requirements of the Landfill Directive, as long as all of this is biodegradable waste. However, it will also need to divert other waste from landfill to meet targets within the Packaging Directive and also a new Directive on electronic waste. In practice this means around 55 per cent of waste will need to be diverted from landfill by 2020.

The Government’s Waste Strategy

The Government’s Waste Strategy 2000 is the framework for England for improving the management of waste and responding to the EU Landfill Directive (Wales and Northern Ireland have written their own strategies). In order to reduce our dependence on landfill the Waste Strategy sets out the following recommendations for action:

- Greater efforts to reduce waste;
- Substantial increase in re-use, recycling and composting;
- Where waste cannot be recycled, recovery of energy from waste, through incineration.

The Government has set the following targets for local authorities:

- Recycle or compost at least 25% of household waste by 2005
- Recycle or compost at least 30% of household waste by 2010
- Recycle or compost at least 33% of household waste by 2015

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The strategy also set the following targets for municipal waste:

- Recover value from 45% by 2010, at least 30% through recycling or composting;
- Recover value from two thirds of municipal waste by 2015, at least half of that through recycling and composting, and to go beyond this in the longer term.

Targets for Wales and Northern Ireland

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has set targets to recover 25% of household waste by 2005 and 40% of household waste by 2010, of which 25% shall be by recycling or composting.

The National Assembly has also set some Wales specific targets as follows:

- By 2003/04 achieve at least 15% recycling/composting of municipal waste with a minimum of 5% composting and 5% recycling;
- By 2006/07 achieve at least 25% recycling/composting of municipal waste with a minimum of 10% composting and 10% recycling;
- By 2009/10 and beyond achieve at least 40% recycling/composting with a minimum 15% composting and 15% recycling.

Incineration

The Waste Strategy states that “where energy recovery facilities are needed... they should be appropriately sized to avoid competition with recycling.” Friends of the Earth opposes the use of incineration because it wastes valuable resources and has a negative affect on people’s health by producing toxic chemicals such as dioxins, which cause cancer. Instead we need recycling and composting to be maximised, together with action on waste minimisation and re-use. This will reduce energy-intensive mining, transportation and production of goods from raw materials. Increased recycling also offers the potential for creating thousands of new jobs which incineration does not.

Strategy Unit and WRAP

The Government’s Strategy Unit (previously the Performance and Innovation Unit) are currently reviewing the UK’s progress so far to meet the targets. The Unit are assessing measures needed to ensure that we meet the EU Landfill Directive and that we develop the potential of new methods of managing waste, particularly waste reduction, re-use and recycling. The Unit’s final report, including options for change and priority areas for action, will be produced in October 2002.

The Government has also set up the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to develop new and stronger markets for recycled materials.

Determining the BPEO

The Waste Strategy states that the process that should be used for considering the relative merits of various waste management options in a particular situation is the Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO). This was defined in the 12th Report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution as:

The outcome of a systematic and consultative decision-making procedure which emphasises the protection and conservation of the environment across land, air and water. The BPEO procedure establishes, for a given set of objectives, the option that provides the most benefits or the least damage to the environment as a whole, at acceptable cost, in the long term as well as in the short term.

In Friends of the Earth’s experience, the process of assessing BPEOs fails to take into account international aspects of gathering resources, the need for greater global equity to share available resources and the needs of future generations. Most BPEOs therefore are biased against maximising resource use.

Friends of Earth's view

Friends of the Earth believes that society should aspire to zero waste. Currently around 80% of our municipal waste can be recycled and composted. Half of our waste could be recycled by 2010. We do not need incineration and any high quality BPEO process would rule out this method of waste disposal. Increased recycling and composting provides the best way to comply with the Landfill Directive and other Directives. The increased landfill tax money should be used to fund doorstep collections of recyclables from every household and stimulate the market for recycled goods.

Further information

Friends of the Earth's waste campaign <http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/waste/>

The Government's Waste Strategy <http://www.defra.gov.uk/>

National Waste Strategy for Wales <http://www.wales.gov.uk/subienvironment/content/wstetext-e.pdf>

Waste Management Strategy Northern Ireland http://www.webzoo.com/ni_v4/

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