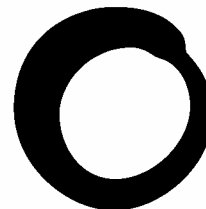


# Briefing Note



**Friends of  
the Earth**

## Hazardous waste mountains

In 2004, the UK will face another major change in dealing with our waste. The 1999 EU Landfill Directive, which has already introduced stiff targets to divert our biodegradable waste away from landfill, bans the co-disposal of hazardous waste with non-hazardous waste from July 2004. It is likely to result in a sharp decrease in disposal capacity for hazardous waste this year, followed by the closure of more sites in the next 3 years. This change must lead the Government and industry to take urgent action to reduce the amount of hazardous waste we produce.

### Facts and figures

- Each year more than 5.2 million tonnes of hazardous waste is produced in England and Wales – largely by the construction, chemicals, electronics and lubricant oil industries.
- Hazardous waste is growing by an estimated 8 per cent a year.
- Landfilling of hazardous waste dropped by just 6 per cent between 1998-9 and 2000, with 40 per cent still being sent to landfill.
- In 2000, 40 per cent of hazardous waste was landfilled, 30 per cent received some form of treatment, 19 per cent was recycled or re-used, 3 per cent was incinerated and 8 per cent was recorded as transferred (short term).

### The five main problems

#### 1. Disposal and treatment capacity

At least 5.2 million tonnes of hazardous waste is produced in the UK every year. A report by the consultants Enviro for the Government's Hazardous Waste Forum has forecast that 3.5 million tonnes of new treatment and disposal capacity will be needed by 2005 at the latest.<sup>1</sup> However, most of this capacity will not be found until 2009.

The biggest shortfall in hazardous waste capacity is predicted to be in landfill. At the moment there are around 200 waste disposal sites in the UK that accept hazardous waste. The ban on the co-disposal of hazardous with non-hazardous waste in landfill will lead to a big drop in this hazardous waste landfill capacity. Roy Watkinson, Hazardous Waste Policy Manager at the Environment Agency, estimated that after 2004 there would only be about a dozen sites in operation.<sup>2</sup> This guess is backed up by the number of applications received by the Environment Agency for permits to continue landfilling hazardous waste. Only 23 sites have applied, and only 12 of these are commercial operations – the rest will be for in-house waste.<sup>3</sup> The commercial sites are concentrated

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in the North East (4) and North West (3), while some regions of England and Wales may end up with no hazardous waste classified landfill sites at all.

Enviros also predicts a shortfall in capacity for high-temperature incineration of around 90,000 tonnes. The cement sector could take in more hazardous waste such as oils, but will want to charge high gate fees. Stockpiling is likely to be required, according to the Chemical Industries Association and waste management operators such as Cleanaway.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Classification of waste**

The volume of hazardous waste could increase by 0.8 million tones when the UK adopts the revised European Hazardous Waste List. This re-classifies some wastes as hazardous, and as a result a much greater range of hazardous wastes will be produced. For example, strip-lighting and TV monitors will now be classed as hazardous waste. Waste Acceptance Criteria tests must be implemented by July 2005.

## **3. Growth areas in hazardous waste**

Hazardous agricultural wastes are likely to be a new area of growth from 2004, when for the first time in its history traditional waste controls are applied to the agriculture sector. As huge areas of contaminated land are cleaned up across England and Wales, the contaminated soils will also add pressure to the existing disposal and treatment capacity.

Other hazardous waste requiring rapid action identified by the Environment Agency includes waste mineral oils and air pollution control (APC) residues from incinerators (fly ash). Around 120-130 tonnes of APC residues are generated every year, with around 100,000 tonnes coming from municipal solid waste. The high levels of chloride in the residues are likely to mean that under the new waste acceptance criteria, it will no longer be adequate to landfill residues without treatment.

## **4. Data on hazardous waste**

The lack of accurate data on hazardous waste arisings and on the availability and capacity of facilities to deal with it makes forward planning difficult. The Government decided not to fund the Environment Agency's proposed second survey of industrial waste.<sup>5</sup>

## **5. Lack of Government action**

The Government has been slow to get to grips with this issue, despite knowing for five years that the UK's co-disposal practice had to end. The Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee, which looked at hazardous waste during 2002, did not consider that a separate hazardous waste strategy was necessary.<sup>6</sup>

However, the Hazardous Waste Forum was set up in December 2002 to play a strategic role in considering the demands on industry of existing and forthcoming legislation. In December 2003, the Forum published its action plan for reducing and managing hazardous waste.<sup>7</sup> This called on the Government to:

- Develop economic instruments – sticks as well as carrots – to encourage hazardous waste producers to act more responsibly;
- Introduce targets only once data is available to underpin them, and only in the long term begin work on better data collection on hazardous waste arisings;
- Encourage separate collection of household hazardous waste;
- Review the waste planning and permitting processes for hazardous waste facilities.

## **Friends of the Earth's recommendations**

In Friends of the Earth's view, the only safe way to deal with the problem of hazardous waste is not to produce it in the first place. There are limits to the amount of toxic waste that the earth can deal with, both in terms of the environment and human health.

In the long term, hazardous waste arisings should decline as a result of European laws. European Directives on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), End-of-Life Vehicles (ELV), Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) and Batteries will all phase out the quantities of hazardous waste entering the waste stream because they will all control the amount of hazardous substances used in products.<sup>8</sup> But it could take ten years for this to have an effect.

In the meantime, Friends of the Earth is calling on the Government to:

- Take swift action to increase the number of collection, re-use and recycling facilities for household hazardous waste;
- Introduce economic and policy instruments that will embed 'producer responsibility' for reducing and managing hazardous waste;
- Set indicative targets for reducing the amount of hazardous waste produced, and start better data collection on hazardous waste arisings immediately. Lack of data should not be used as an excuse for not setting targets;
- Protect the right of local communities to be involved in planning decisions about hazardous waste facilities, even as it becomes more urgent to dispose of or recycle toxic waste safely.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Enviro, 'Quantifying Hazardous Waste Capacity Needs'. Presentation to the Hazardous Waste Forum, 30 September 2003. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/hazforum/031021/enviros.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> PA News, 2nd April 2003
- <sup>3</sup> ENDS Report 343, August, 2003
- <sup>4</sup> ENDS Report 345, October 2003
- <sup>5</sup> ENDS Report 327, April 2002
- <sup>6</sup> EFRA eighth report of session 2001/2 (Ref HC919)
- <sup>7</sup> Hazardous Waste Forum (2003) 'Hazardous Waste - an action plan for its reduction and environmentally sound management', 19 December 2003. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/hazforum/actionplan/hwf-actionplan.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> ENTEC (2003) 'Hazardous Waste Management Market Pressures and Opportunities'. Sections 2.34 – 2.39