

Highlights of Waste Strategy 2000

In response to the demands of the Landfill Directive, and other European directives on waste, the Government produced a National Waste Strategy in May 2000 [1] which sets out its views on the future for waste management in England and Wales. This briefing highlights the main points of the Waste Strategy.

Current waste arisings and management

In England & Wales, we produce around 400 million tonnes of waste each year. The quantity of municipal, industrial and commercial waste produced in 1998-1999 is seen in table 1 [for more information on the various types of wastes, see Friends of the Earth's (FOE's) Waste Streams briefing], while table 2 shows the breakdown of waste management methods used for these types of waste.

Table 1 - Waste production for municipal, industrial and commercial waste in England & Wales, 1998/1999

Type of waste	Million tonnes
- Municipal waste ¹	28
- Industrial waste ²	48
- Commercial waste	30

(1) waste collected by or on behalf of the local authority

(2) excluding construction and demolition waste

Table 2 - Waste management for municipal, industrial and commercial waste in England & Wales, 1998/1999

Type of waste	Landfill (%)	Recovery ³ (%)	Recycling/Composting (%)
Municipal waste ¹	83	17	9
Industrial waste ²	47	45	39
Commercial waste	66	33	29

(1) waste collected by or on behalf of the local authority

(2) excluding construction and demolition waste

(3) including recycling and composting

Targets for recovery, recycling, Composting and landfill reduction

Recovery of municipal waste

We must 'recover value' from 40% of municipal waste by 2005, from 45% by 2010, and from 67% by 2015. By 'recover value' the Government means recycling, composting, other forms of material recovery such as anaerobic digestion, or energy recovery through incineration, gasification or pyrolysis [see FOE's Waste Management Methods Briefing for an explanation of what these methods consist in].

Recycling and composting of municipal waste

We must recycle or compost 25% of household waste by 2005, 30% by 2010, and 33% by 2015. These targets are to be achieved by statutory performance standards for local authorities responsible for waste disposal. So far, the following standards have been set for 2003:

- Local authorities who were recycling under 5% in 1998-99 must recycle over 10%.
- Local authorities recycling between 5-15% in 1998-99 must double their rate.
- Local authorities recycling over 15% in 1998-99 must recycle a third of household waste.

Further standards for 2005 and 2010 are to be set in the future.

Reduction of landfilling for industrial and commercial waste

We must reduce industrial and commercial waste sent to landfill to 85% of 1998 levels by 2015.

Decision-making on waste

The Strategy requires that decisions on the type of waste management technique to use, including decisions on suitable sites for treatment and disposal, should be based on a local assessment of the **Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO)**. This requires managers to take decisions which minimise damage to the environment as a whole, at an acceptable cost in the long and short term. It is based on three key considerations:

- The **Waste Hierarchy** places reduction at the top, as the most preferable option for managing waste. This is followed by re-use, then recovery through recycling, composting and energy recovery, and lastly disposal. It is important to note that the strategy states that “incineration with energy recovery should not be considered before the opportunities for recycling and composting have been explored.”

- The **Proximity Principle** requires waste to be disposed of as close to the place of production as possible. This avoids passing the environmental costs of waste management to communities which are not responsible for its generation. It also reduces the environmental costs of transporting waste.

- **Self sufficiency.** Waste should not be exported from the UK for disposal, and waste planning authorities and the waste management industry should aim, wherever practicable, for regional self sufficiency in managing waste.

Friends of the Earth's view of the Waste Strategy

While Friends of the Earth welcomes the statutory performance standards for local authority recycling, it believes that the Waste Strategy 2000 has the following shortcomings [2].

First, the Waste Strategy fails to consider waste in the context of global resource use or consider the impact of the UK's consumption patterns on other countries. It does not set a target for waste reduction despite the fact that this is the most preferred management option at the top of the waste hierarchy.

Secondly, the Waste Strategy's targets for municipal waste require that two thirds of waste be recovered by 2015 but require for only one third of waste to be recycled or composted by 2015. This leaves the door open for incinerating at least one third of waste (up to two thirds if landfill is no longer used). While the Strategy does not say that local authorities *must* use incineration as a way of achieving the recovery targets, many are planning to incinerate more than a third of their waste. Also, the recycling and composting targets in the Strategy are not high enough to divert sufficient waste from landfill to meet the demands of the Landfill Directive [for more information on this directive, see FOE's Main EU Directives on Waste Briefing] . Friends

of the Earth considers that a statutory target to recycle or compost 50% of household waste by 2010 would be appropriate and achievable, as already up to 80% of household waste is recyclable or compostable.

Thirdly, the Strategy (and subsequent announcements in the Spending Review [3] and in a speech by Tony Blair to the CBI and the Green Alliance [4]) provide inadequate funding for the development of source separated door-to-door collections across the country, or to support the infrastructure, publicity and education needed to drive councils to recycling intensive strategies. Friends of the Earth also thinks that money raised from the landfill tax should be allocated to support kerbside collections for recyclable and compostable waste [see FOE's Funding Briefing for more information on this].

A report published by the House of Commons' Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee [5] backs up everything Friends of the Earth has said about the Government's Waste Strategy. It condemns the strategy as “*depressing*”, “*woefully inadequate*” and “*an underfunded compromise*”. The Committee believes that “*incineration will never play a major role in truly sustainable waste management*” and that the Government's Waste Strategy leaves “*the door open to a big expansion of large-scale incineration of household waste*”. It also thinks that “*the kerbside collection of source-separated waste is a necessity*”. The 30% and 33% recycling targets for 2010 and 2015 are seen as ‘*depressingly unambitious*’. The Committee wants the Government to set recycling targets of 50% by 2010 and 60% by 2015 to show that there is not a ceiling on recycling and composting potential.

References

1. DETR, 2000, *Waste Strategy 2000*, The Stationery Office.
2. FOE, 2000, *Memorandum from Friends of the Earth to the Environment Sub-Committee of the House of Commons' Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs*, FOE
3. Treasury, 2000, *2000 Spending Review : Investing in the Future Departmental Investment Strategies: A Summary*, November.
www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2000/dis/whitepaper.pdf
4. Blair, Tony, 2000, Speech to the Confederation of British Industry and the Green Alliance, *Guardian*, 24/10.
5. Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, 2001, *Delivering Sustainable Waste Management*, House of Commons.

Friends of the Earth

26-28 Underwood Street

LONDON

N1 7JQ

Tel: 020 7490 1555

E-mail: info@foe.co.uk

Website: www.foe.co.uk

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Author: Karine Pellaumail

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