



# Briefing

# The Recycling Bill

## Doorstep recycling services to every household

### Introduction

Only 12 per cent of our municipal waste is recycled in England and Wales, one of the lowest figures in Western Europe, despite the fact that over 60% of the materials in our bins could be recycled or composted. Recycling is one of the most important ways in which we can all 'do our bit' for the environment. It is a popular and easy activity which is vitally important for reducing our consumption of resources. It also creates jobs, saves energy, and reduces the pollution from waste disposal. Friends of the Earth wants every household in the country to have a doorstep recycling service, so that recycling is as easy as putting the rubbish out.

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### **What is the recycling bill?**

The bill is calling for every local authority to provide a quality doorstep recycling collection service to every household by 2010. The collection service would initially apply to glass, metal containers, paper and later be extended to more materials such as plastics. The bill is also asking for every household to be provided with facilities to compost biodegradable kitchen and garden waste either at home or through collections of waste which are processed in a central composting facility. The bill is essential in order to dramatically increase our appalling household recycling/composting rate.

### **Why do we need the recycling bill?**

#### **A lot more could be recycled**

In England, only 12% [<sup>1</sup>] of household waste is currently recycled and/or composted when over 60% of household waste is recyclable and/or compostable [<sup>2</sup>]. It should not have to be like this. Some countries already recycle a lot more, for instance Switzerland (52%), Austria (50%), Germany (48%) and the Netherlands (46%). Furthermore, some areas in the UK already achieve high recycling rates. The Mersea Island trial area in Colchester (Essex), for instance, boasts a recycling rate of 57% while both the schemes in Wealden (East Sussex) and Daventry in Northamptonshire have achieved 53% [<sup>3</sup>][<sup>4</sup>].

#### **Doorstep recycling services are the best way to achieve higher recycling rates**

Doorstep recycling services are essential to reach the high recycling rates that we know are possible. Other recycling facilities, like bottle banks and supermarket recycling bins, play a part for collecting materials. They are not, however, suitable for everyone, for example elderly people who cannot walk far with heavy recyclables, disabled people or those without a car. The only way to encourage and enable everyone to recycle is to provide doorstep collection services for all households.

Areas in the UK which have achieved high recycling rates have managed to do so by implementing quality doorstep recycling services. In Mersea Island in Colchester, the 57% recycling rate was achieved just 3 months after the implementation of the trial scheme while in Wealden, the trial scheme increased the recycling rate from 8% to 52% within a year. In Daventry, the recycling rate rose from 12% in 1998/1999 to 36% in 1999-2000 and then to 53% in 2000/2001 [<sup>3</sup>].

#### **More recycling will bring benefits for the economy**

Recycling offers enormous potential for job creation. A recent study [<sup>5</sup>] suggested that up to 45,000 jobs could be created in the recycling industry if the Government were just to meet its recycling target of 30% by 2010. A US study showed that recycling creates 400-600 jobs per million tonnes of waste and composting 200-300 jobs, which is significantly more than landfill (40-60) and incineration (100-290) [<sup>6</sup>].

#### **More recycling will bring benefits for the environment**

Recycling decreases the demand for raw materials such as paper pulp and metal ores. By doing so, it reduces the habitat damage, pollution and waste associated with the extraction, transport and processing of raw materials (see box on next page). Recycling also saves

energy when compared to producing goods from raw materials. As most energy is derived from fossil fuels, this in turn reduces the emissions of greenhouse gases contributing to climate change [7]. Composting reduces the volume of waste by 40% and creates a quality compost which can be used for gardening and agriculture.

### Use of raw materials and environmental impact

Paper - The last 5% of old forest in Scandinavia is still cut down to provide paper for us [8]. Loss of habitat means that species, such as the golden eagle and grey headed woodpecker, are threatened with extinction [9].

Aluminium - Extracting aluminium is an extremely polluting process and can mean destroying large habitats. For instance, to power an aluminium mine in Ghana, a dam was built and created a lake half the size of Wales [8]

### More recycling will bring benefits for health

More recycling means that less has to be disposed of to landfill and incinerators. Landfill sites have been associated with birth defects [10][11][12] while incinerators are responsible for producing emissions of highly toxic dioxins as well as toxic ash [3][13].

## Support for the recycling bill

### Political support

This bill draws on a cross-party consensus. Both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties promised nationwide doorstep recycling services in their manifestos. Moreover, the Prime Minister said at a conference organised by the Green Alliance and the Confederation for British Industry in October 2000 "I want to see every local authority offering doorstep recycling".

The bill now has the support of the majority of MPs (over 380MPs) and Joan Ruddock MP, who was picked in the Private Members' ballot on 21 of November 2002, has adopted the bill. Joan Ruddock has also put down a new parliamentary petition on the recycling bill (Early Day Motion 333) for this parliamentary session (2002-2003).

### National organisations support

150 local authorities and over 100 organisations support the bill, including Friends of the Earth, the Community Recycling Network, Waste Watch, Help the Aged, Consumers' Association, Greenpeace, Women's Environmental Network, Welsh Consumer Council, Young People's Trust for the Environment, National Alliance of Women's Organisations and UNISON.

### General public support

Recycling is a very popular activity. It is easy, and is the first thing people will do for the environment, before they get out of their cars! Nine out of ten people in England and Wales would recycle more waste if it was made easier, an Environment Agency survey revealed in 2002 [14]. Thousands of people have already written to their MPs asking them to sign the parliamentary petition on doorstep recycling services for the 2001-2002 session (EDM 186).

### **How would the recycling bill work?**

#### **What does a doorstep recycling service involve?**

A doorstep recycling service means that all people have to do is separate their waste at home and put it in different bins ready for collection each week. Usually this may involve a bin/box for 'dry' recyclables like glass, metals, plastics and paper, a bin for compostable kitchen and garden waste and a bin for 'residual waste' which cannot be recycled or composted. Residual waste includes things like disposable nappies or packaging made from a mixture of different materials which cannot be separated.

#### **How much would a doorstep recycling service cost?**

The average net cost of providing a doorstep recycling and composting service is £17 per household per year (i.e. £9 per year for a doorstep collection service for dry recyclables plus £8 per year for a doorstep collection service for compostables) - around £375 million for England and Wales [<sup>15</sup>]. Government money allocated for waste for the years 2002-3 and 2003-4 is around £180-200 million per year so the shortfall should be no more than £200 million per year (and with encouragement for home composting and waste reduction, it could be much less). The government could find much of this extra money by scrapping the landfill tax credit scheme - worth £100 million a year - and diverting this cash into recycling. The government could also use more of the landfill tax money they collect - worth more than £400 million per year.

#### **Would the recycling bill be flexible?**

The bill allows for flexibility, leaving it to local authorities to decide how they would promote home composting and organise their doorstep recycling and composting services.

#### **How would doorstep recycling collection work in rural areas & urban high rises?**

It is sometimes argued that due to logistical problems it is too difficult to recycle in very rural areas or in high rise urban residences. However, if local councils can collect our rubbish, then it seems reasonable to expect that they can establish systems to collect our recyclable waste. Schemes are already in place in England and Wales to show that this is indeed possible.

- **High rise recycling schemes**

There are already doorstep recycling schemes in various high rise buildings. In Brighton & Hove, residents can take their recyclables to mini-recycling centres which have been set up for a whole block of flats. Materials from these centres are collected each week [<sup>3</sup>]. In the case of the London Borough of Hounslow's tower blocks, recycling collections are operated by the caretakers from the housing department rather than the residents. Each resident has been given a storage basket. Baskets are left on each landing on a set collection day and materials are collected in wheeled bins using the lift. Materials are sorted at ground level and stored in a garage next to the towers [<sup>3</sup>].

- **Rural recycling schemes**

There are many examples of doorstep recycling collections happening in rural areas around the country, such as those run by Wealden District Council (Sussex), Daventry District

Council (Northamptonshire) and Dorset County Council. In Wealden, for instance, the district collects dry recyclables and green waste one week and the residual waste bin the next week. The collection uses the same vehicle and crew [3]. Given that rural households are more likely to produce green waste, it is particularly vital for the local authority to promote composting at home, on the farm or in the community to cut down on the amount of green waste that needs to be collected.

### How to show support for the recycling bill

The bill has now been adopted by Joan Ruddock MP. This is a very important step but we will need your help to make sure it becomes law. The bill will have its second reading on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2003 when we need at least 100 MPs voting in favour of the bill for it to progress to further stages.

- **Come to the “Waste no More” lobby and rally on Wednesday 22 January 2003 from 1pm.** The lobby, which starts at 2pm, will be the chance to ask in person for your MP to (1) vote for the recycling bill at its second reading on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2003 and (2) press ministers so that the forthcoming waste strategy includes more recycling and no more incineration. There will be a rally with speakers on waste at 1pm and time for networking from 4pm until 9pm. For more information and to register go to [www.foe.co.uk/waste\\_lobby](http://www.foe.co.uk/waste_lobby) or call 08705 224488 (calls charged at local rate).
- **Please write to your MP** asking him/her to (1) sign Early Day Motion 333 on doorstep recycling services (2) be available on the afternoon of 22 January 2003 when constituents will come to lobby their MPs about waste issues and (3) most importantly vote for the recycling bill at its second reading on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2003. You can do this in two ways:
  - Go to MP [www.foe.co.uk/waste\\_action](http://www.foe.co.uk/waste_action) and send a pre-prepared email, fax or letter to your MP.
  - Alternatively write to your MP at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

Send any replies from MPs, with your details to Parliamentary Unit, Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ.

## The Recycling Bill

Written by Karine Pellaumail on behalf of Friends of the Earth. Thanks to Camilla Freeman, Martyn Williams and Flora McMorris. November 2002.

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