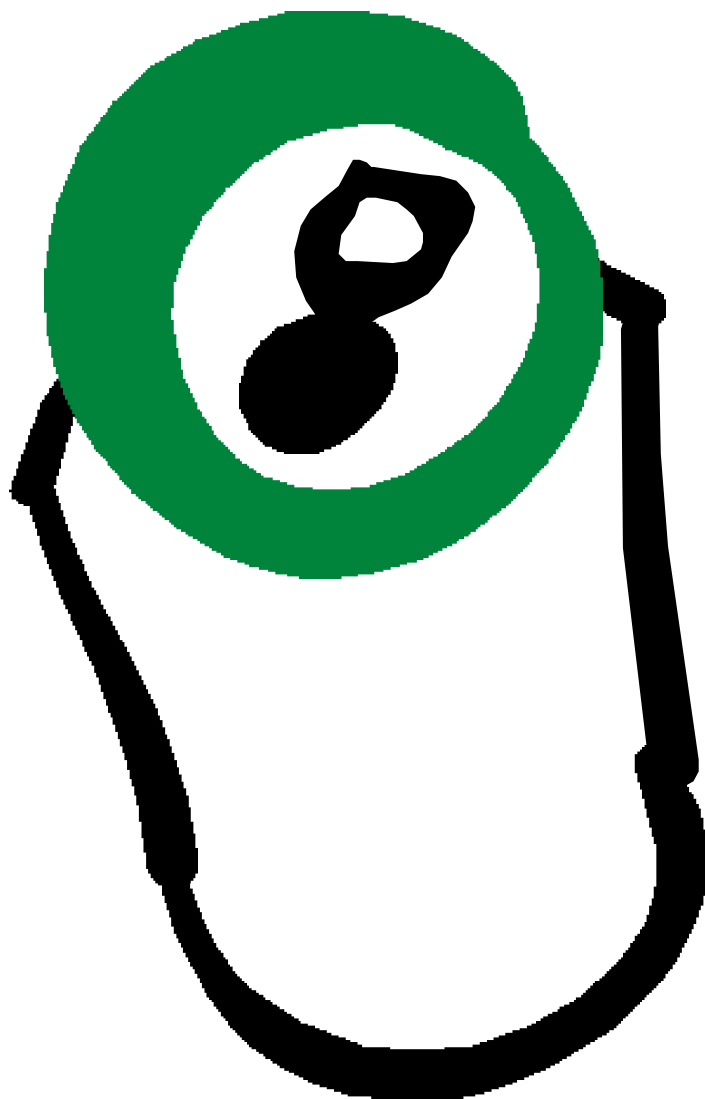




**Friends of  
the Earth**

# **Tackling waste**

**in the English regions**





# Introduction

Regional Waste Strategies are being developed in all the English regions.<sup>1</sup> Research and strategies are starting to emerge, but are typically based on old-style thinking: tip as much waste as Europe allows into landfill, recycle as little as the Government demands and incinerate the rest. This is not sustainable waste management. There has also been a lack of public consultation in most regions so far. Regional Waste Strategies should be an opportunity to start a revolution in resource use at the regional level. For a sustainable future, Friends of the Earth believes each region should:

- Aspire to ‘zero waste’
- Set high recycling and composting targets: 50 per cent by 2010 and 75 per cent by 2015
- Write a flexible strategy, to allow progressive improvements in waste reduction, re-use, recycling and composting
- Rule out incineration
- Consider the use of local, small-scale mechanical-biological treatment (MBT) for residual waste, with the residuals from this process going to landfill
- Ensure the regional strategy genuinely involves, and is informed by, all key stakeholders.

<sup>1</sup> This briefing deals primarily with the eight English regions other than London. The London Mayor's draft waste strategy has been published – see [www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/strategies/waste/index.jsp](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/strategies/waste/index.jsp).

# The problem

## Strategies falling short

The English regions have an increasingly important role to play in waste management. The new regional waste strategies – which will form part of Regional Planning Guidance – should deliver on the Government’s Waste Strategy 2000 and follow national planning guidance, which emphasises:

- moving the treatment of waste up the waste hierarchy – away from disposal and towards recycling, re-use and minimisation;<sup>2</sup>
- identifying the ‘best practicable environmental option’ for each waste stream;<sup>3</sup>
- complying with the ‘proximity principle’ – ensuring waste is dealt with close to where it is produced;
- ensuring that all interested groups are properly consulted before a preferred waste strategy is drawn up.

Planning for waste at regional level is a new chance to ensure that waste management in England is both strategic and sustainable.

Unfortunately, problems with waste planning at local level – in Waste Local Plans and municipal waste management strategies – have begun to be reflected in regional waste strategies too:

- failure to account for waste management improving over time;
- failure to anticipate tighter EU legislation on recycling and composting;
- a ‘predict and provide’ approach, assuming that municipal waste will almost double by 2020;
- use of poor quality data to justify locking authorities into long-term contracts with incinerators which may then prevent future improvements in recycling and composting;
- lack of appreciation of the effectiveness of community recycling and composting initiatives;
- and failure to consult adequately before deciding policies.



### **Managing the region’s resources**

**In the UK, we consume more than our fair share of the world’s resources, then we tip most of our waste in landfill or incinerators so it cannot be reused. Our future can only be sustainable if we cut our excessive use of resources, make products to last, replace toxic production with new clean technologies and reuse, recycle and compost our waste. Regions have a key role to play in promoting innovation in waste technologies, and supporting community enterprises for re-use and recycling.**

<sup>2</sup> The Government’s decision turning down expansion of the Edmonton incinerator made clear that incinerators should not pre-empt recycling or composting. Statement by Energy Minister Brian Wilson, 23 May 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The Inspector who dismissed Severn Waste Services’ appeal over the refusal of the Kidderminster incinerator listed as one of his reasons the lack of a realistic BPEO assessment. Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision by KG Smith, 10 July 2002.

# The solution

## Six steps towards effective waste strategies

### 1. Head for zero waste

Interest is growing in the idea of progressively reducing the waste we generate: the concept is called zero waste. The zero waste movement has been led by best practice within business.<sup>4</sup> The aim is to progressively improve competitiveness through improvements in efficiency, including efficient use of resources such as energy and water. European 'end of life' directives have helped this process by encouraging manufacturers to produce goods which can be dismantled and re-used.

Growing support for the zero waste charter suggests that the public sector is starting to catch up. Making progress towards zero waste will require continual improvements in reduction, re-use, recycling and composting and in separate collection of different types of waste. This should result in progressive reduction in residual waste (what is left after recycling and composting). While at national and EU level the appropriate legislative and financial measures to move towards zero waste should be put in place, the English regions can play their part by resolving that all recyclable and compostable waste should be removed from the waste stream by 2020.

Some local authorities such as Bath and North East Somerset, Braintree and Lewes are already supporting a 10 point zero waste charter.<sup>5</sup> The South West Regional Assembly has also been actively exploring the possibility of pursuing a zero waste strategy for the region, including a conference on the issue in October 2002. Friends of the Earth urges all regions to adopt a zero waste vision.

### 2. Aim high on recycling and composting

Recent research carried out for the Community Recycling Network suggests that if all waste authorities adopt current best practice in England, recycling rates in the range of 27 per cent to 36 per cent could be very easily achieved.<sup>6</sup> The key to getting there is providing high-quality doorstep collection services. Once these are in place, it should be possible to reduce collections of residual waste to fortnightly.

The same research suggests that by following European best practice, it should be possible to achieve levels of recycling and composting around 60 per cent fairly quickly, or 70 per cent including material recovered



#### **Waste and sustainable development**

**A sustainable future is dependent on effective waste management. The principles of sustainable development – set out in the regions' Sustainable Development Framework (RSDf) – should be met through regional waste strategies. For instance, achieving social progress which recognises the needs of everyone means ruling out polluting waste facilities in deprived wards when these wouldn't be acceptable in richer communities.**

**Effective protection of the environment is threatened by landfilling toxic or biodegradable waste and incinerating mixed waste. And effective waste management strategies can help sustain local economies. Recycling or composting 30 per cent of our household waste could create around 45,000 jobs nationally.**

from residual waste. This will require separate collections of different waste streams, including kitchen waste, and changes in legislation, regulation and taxation. It is entirely feasible to aim for this level of recycling over 10 years, and some areas will reach these levels even earlier.

Should regional strategies simply be about trickling the national waste policy downwards, assuming no change in policy for the next 10 or 20 years? Or should they push the boundaries of resource management, building on regional innovation and enterprise? Friends of the Earth urges all regions to set high recycling and composting targets, thereby accelerating national break-throughs in recycling and composting services and technology.

### 3. Write flexible strategies

To achieve zero waste and high recycling and composting, regions will need flexible waste strategies. This flexibility is perfectly in line with the requirement on Regional Technical Advisory Bodies (RTABs) to review and roll forward waste policies at about five-year intervals, in line with developing national and European policies and changes in waste-management practice.<sup>7</sup>

The amount of residual waste in a region will reduce year on year, as recycling and composting increases, and improvements are made in product design and packaging. The large-scale, long-term contracts which are necessary for mass burn incineration are too inflexible to deal with this change. The government refused the expansion of Edmonton incinerator in north London on the grounds that no waste management facility should be permitted which would pre-empt recycling or composting, or reduce the ability to increase recycling in the future, or which might lead to waste being imported from other areas, contrary to the Proximity Principle.<sup>8</sup>

### 4. Rule out incineration

In the past, almost all residual waste in the UK has been landfilled untreated. The European landfill directive now means we face a radical shift away from landfill. Until recently, the only alternative to landfill which has been considered is incineration. But Friends of the Earth believes that the regions should rule out incineration:

- **It undermines recycling.** Incineration typically ties local authorities into long-term contracts (25-30 years) which will prevent them from maximising recycling. Nottingham City Council's long-term contract with WRG's municipal waste incinerator – agreed in 1973 – has seriously constrained recycling. Part of the contract allows WRG to demand that up to 100 per cent of all municipal waste collected by the City Council is brought to the incinerator until 2032. The City Council is among the worst unitary councils in England for recycling.
- **It is bad for climate change.** Recent research for Community Recycling Network suggests that the climate impact of incineration is worse than any other way of dealing with residual waste, including mechanical biological treatment (MBT), pyrolysis and landfill.<sup>9</sup>
- **It is deeply polluting** Incineration produces emissions containing nitrogen dioxides, particulates, heavy metals and dioxins, all of which potentially threaten human health. It also produces toxic fly ash, which is classified as hazardous waste, and contains dioxins and heavy metals.
- **It is a waste of regional resources** Incineration creates very few jobs compared with recycling, and is more capital-cost intensive. It has opportunity costs – investment in incineration means a missed chance to invest in new environmental industries.

## 5. Use MBT for residual waste

A number of other options for dealing with residual waste are becoming more significant:

- **Pyrolysis** which involves heating waste in the absence of air, forming a char and noxious gases.
- **Gasification** which further processes the products of pyrolysis to create a gas with high calorific value, which can be burnt to produce electricity and/or heat.
- **Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT)** which separates recyclable materials mechanically and puts the mixed waste containing biodegradable material through a composting process (aerobic or anaerobic) to produce a stabilised material. This can be landfilled or used for energy recovery.



### The use of waste management consultants

Most waste management strategies are drawn up with the advice of consultants. Friends of the Earth recommends that consultants should:

- adopt a demand management approach, with review built in, maintaining flexibility to allow progressive decreases in residual waste, instead of the usual 'predict and provide' approach;
- consider the best practicable recycling and composting targets in the longer term, not just statutory targets set for 2005;
- consider a broad range of options for treating residual waste, including mechanical/biological treatment (MBT);
- consult on the assumptions used in assessment methodology, not just on the results; and
- publish the full report including data, data sources and weaknesses.

Recent research for the Community Recycling Network has reviewed some of these newer technologies, comparing them with landfilling untreated waste and with incineration.<sup>10</sup> This suggests that MBT processes provide the greatest flexibility:

- MBT equipment has a lower capital cost than incinerators and can operate on a smaller modular basis. It does not require long-term contracts for guaranteed large inputs of waste.
- MBT can be easily converted from residual mixed waste input to source-separated waste for clean composting or recycling.
- The output from MBT can be put to a variety of uses: for landfill, landscaping, for energy recovery through pyrolysis/gasification; or for energy recovery through co-incineration in coal-fired power stations or cement kilns (though this use would be controversial).

The research results indicate that the best route for the residual waste from this treatment is landfill. Friends of the Earth is supportive of this but will keep this under review as new technologies develop or as policy frameworks change.

## 6. Conduct genuine public consultation

Incineration and landfill are both very unpopular. Local elections have been won and lost on this issue in the past few years in places such as Guildford and Kidderminster. New proposals for pyrolysis and gasification are also being resisted by communities in, for example, Derby and Canterbury. For regional waste strategies to be realistic and supported by the community, genuine involvement by the environment and community sector is essential. In particular, public participation is essential if high recycling strategies are to work. While some regions have conducted an extensive consultation process, others have been taken aback by interest from the public and discouraged direct input to the work of the RTAB.

Friends of the Earth urges all RTABs which have not yet reported to ensure that stakeholders genuinely contribute to their final reports. We also recommend that all planning bodies undertake further public consultation before the regional waste strategy is drawn up.

4 Robin Murray, *Zero Waste*, 2002, p 19.

5 The Zero Waste Charter can be found on the Guildford Anti-Incinerator Network website at [www.no-incinerator.org.uk/ZWCharter.htm](http://www.no-incinerator.org.uk/ZWCharter.htm)

6 Community Recycling Network (2002) *Maximising Recycling Rates – Tackling Residuals*. [www.crn.org.uk/publications/main/index.html](http://www.crn.org.uk/publications/main/index.html)

7 ODPM, Planning Policy Guidance Note 10: *Planning and Waste Management*, Annex B, para B2h.

8 Taken from Energy Minister Brian Wilson's statement on Edmonton incinerator, 23 May 2002.

9 Community Recycling Network (2002) *Maximising Recycling Rates – Tackling Residuals*. [www.crn.org.uk/publications/main/index.html](http://www.crn.org.uk/publications/main/index.html)

10 *ibid*

# Conclusion

Regional waste strategies are a critical part of dealing with the UK's waste crisis while making the most of the world's limited resources. For a sustainable future, Friends of the Earth believes each region should:

- aspire to 'zero waste';
- set high recycling and composting targets: 50 per cent by 2010 and 75 per cent by 2015;
- write a flexible strategy, to allow progressive improvements in waste reduction, re-use, recycling and composting;
- rule out incineration;
- consider the use of local, small-scale mechanical-biological treatment (MBT) for residual waste, with the residuals from this process going to landfill;
- ensure the regional strategy genuinely involves, and is informed by, all key stakeholders.

# Appendix

## Government guidance on waste strategies

Regional waste strategies are required as part of Regional Planning Guidance (RPG). Relevant Government policy is contained in Planning Policy Guidance 11 (Regional Planning) Chapter 13, Planning Policy Guidance 10 (Waste Planning) Annex B and Waste Strategy 2000.

Currently, draft RPG is drawn up by Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) but following a public hearing, final RPG is issued by the Secretary of State. In five English Regions the RPB is the regional assembly. In the other three regions (East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands) the RPB is the local government conference, but assemblies should be consulted on development of RPG. In future, where assemblies are elected they will be responsible for approving final RPG.

Planning Policy Guidance includes the following points:

- Regional Technical Advisory Bodies (RTABs) should identify options for regional waste management requirements, and make recommendations, after taking account of the views of “voluntary environmental and community interests” as well as those who are responsible for waste collection and disposal.<sup>11</sup>
- The Regional Planning Body should then consult a wider range of organisations, which might include “commercial and business interests and environmental organisations” before identifying a preferred regional strategy.<sup>12</sup>
- Waste Planning Authorities should demonstrate that “the selected policies represent the best balance of social, environmental and economic costs and benefits, after full consideration of the BPEO [Best Practicable Environmental Option] and the principles of sustainable development.”<sup>13</sup>

Waste management decisions should be based on four principles:

- Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) for each waste stream
- Regional self-sufficiency
- Proximity principle
- Waste hierarchy.<sup>14</sup>

Regional Planning Guidance should “set regional waste management capacity and disposal targets, including for the recycling and recovery of waste, to promote sustainable waste management, waste minimisation and alternatives to landfill. The targets should be consistent with local authorities achieving statutory performance standards for household waste recycling and composting. In general they should promote the moving of waste up the hierarchy of treatment methods (reduction, reuse, material recycling and composting, energy recovery, and disposal without energy recovery).” RPG should also set indicators for regular monitoring, and specify the number and capacity of the different types of waste management facilities that will be required.<sup>15</sup>

11 ODPM, Planning Policy Guidance Note 10: *Planning and Waste Management*, Annex B para B4

12 *ibid* Annex B para B5

13 *ibid* para 28

14 *ibid* para 6

15 ODPM, Planning Policy Guidance Note 11: *Regional Planning*, para 13.4

## Tackling waste in the English regions

This briefing is part of Friends of the Earth's We Live Here programme for sustainable English regions. The programme provides solutions for sustainable growth that improves quality of life, minimises environmental damage and tackles social exclusion in all the regions of England.

For more information please contact the address and phone number below.

**Friends of the Earth inspires solutions to environmental problems which make life better for people.**

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- the most extensive environmental network in the world, with almost one million supporters across five continents and over 60 national organisations worldwide
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- dependent on individuals for over 90 per cent of its income.

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