



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# **THE WAY FORWARD ON WASTE**

## **Friends of the Earth's policy recommendations for municipal waste management**

### **Introduction**

The UK could use resources much more efficiently than it does at present. By doing so it could create new jobs, new technologies and new industries. This would reduce the significant social and environmental damage caused in developing countries where most resources are currently extracted and help meet global environmental limits<sup>1</sup>. It would also reduce the social and environmental damage caused in the UK by current waste disposal operations, such as landfill and incineration. This paper outlines the actions required by the European Union, national governments and local authorities if the UK is to become a resource efficient "zero waste" society.

### **Actions required by the European Union**

The European Union has a key role to play in enabling the achievement of zero waste. In its strategy on resource use it should aspire to zero waste and develop a programme to move towards it. This should include legislation to ensure that products made and sold within the Union are designed for durability, reuse and 100 per cent recycling.

### **Actions required by national governments**

Governments should aspire to rapidly move towards zero waste and develop a strategy to do so. They should ban the building of disposal technologies such as incinerators - often misleadingly titled "waste to energy plants" - which demand large quantities of waste. They should also ban the disposal of compostable or recyclable materials from 2010 and ensure that waste treatment plants are small-scale and adhere to the proximity principle.

They should set statutory recycling targets for local authorities (50 per cent by 2010 and 75 per cent by 2015) and consult on setting a waste minimisation target. They should also amend the law so that every household is provided with a doorstep recycling and composting service by 2010 at the latest (with interim targets, such as 80 per cent of households covered by 2006). They should also prevent local authorities entering into long-term contracts which inhibit the move towards zero waste (contracts should be limited to around 10 years).

They should also introduce a range of economic incentives to reduce resource use and increase waste reuse, recycling and the development of markets for recycled materials. The landfill tax should become a disposal tax (to include incineration) and should be raised to significantly increase the cost of landfill and incineration. The proceeds from this should be used to fund local authority recycling and composting. Perverse subsidies to incineration and other disposal technologies should be removed. Resource taxes, for example on virgin paper or aluminium, should be introduced to reflect the environmental and social damage caused by their extraction. Taxes to encourage reuse of products should be introduced (e.g. deposit on beverage containers, plastic bags tax).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on environmental limits see Friends of the Earth's publication *More from Less*, available at: <http://www.foe.co.uk/pubsinfo/pubscat/>

<sup>2</sup> As little as 15-25 per cent of municipal waste at 2010/2015 and declining further over time.

<sup>3</sup> Friends of the Earth has commissioned research into the options for treating the waste remaining after intensive recycling and composting (see [http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/maximising\\_recycling\\_rates\\_report.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/maximising_recycling_rates_report.pdf)). It suggests that incineration and the disposal of untreated waste in landfills are the worst environmental options. Of the other options, Friends of the Earth opposes the burning of this waste in cement kilns or power plants which only perform well in the study because they are currently burning coal rather than gas (and hence one dirty fuel is only being replaced by a less dirty fuel). These plants should not be burning coal. With regards pyrolysis and gasification the data is less clear. Friends of the Earth will continue to oppose these technologies for treating this waste stream until evidence is produced which shows that they are able to operate to a standard which is better for climate change, human toxicity and other environmental impacts than our stated preference. This is likely to require the removal of these technologies from the Renewables Obligation (where they risk displacing clean renewables such as wind, solar and wave).

## Actions required by local authorities

### Forward thinking!

Produce a waste strategy aspiring to zero waste. Aim to recycle 60 per cent of municipal waste by 2010 and 75 per cent by 2015. Also aim to remove all reusable, recyclable and compostable waste from the waste stream by 2020.

### Waste minimisation

Promote and support waste minimisation schemes (e.g. nappy washing services, local refillable schemes, furniture reuse schemes, low packaging shops and markets).

### Composting waste

Provide all households with weekly doorstep collection of separated food waste by 2006. By the same date, all households should also be offered a subsidised or free composting bin for garden waste, or if they prefer a regular free separate collection. This waste should be composted or anaerobically digested locally.

### Recycling waste

Provide all households with doorstep recycling service for separated dry recyclables by 2010 at the latest (with high interim targets, such as 80 per cent of households by 2006). Dry recyclable materials include paper, glass, cans, plastics and batteries.

### Other wastes

A free service for the collection, reuse and recycling of large electrical goods, furniture and other bulky wastes should be introduced. Civic amenity sites should be organised to ensure very high levels of reuse, recycling and composting. Local authorities should also remove recyclable materials from street waste

### Householder incentives

Provide householders with financial incentives, either rewards or penalties, if participation rates are too low to meet recycling targets. These should be designed to not have a disproportionate impact on any particular sectors of society. They should only be introduced when the doorstep recycling and composting services have been in place for two years and extensive communication and education programmes undertaken.

### Dealing with the rest

The limited amount of waste remaining after an intensive waste minimisation, reuse and recycling scheme still requires treating. The quantity of this waste will reduce over time, therefore ruling out large and inflexible technologies such as incineration. Firstly, any remaining recyclable waste should be removed (e.g. metals, plastics, some paper). Secondly the small amount<sup>2</sup> of waste remaining after this should be composted or anaerobically digested and, unless sufficiently clean to be used as compost, should be disposed of to landfill (as the disposal route with lowest environmental impacts for this waste)<sup>3</sup>. These processes should occur in small, localised treatment plants.