



THE REALITY OF RECYCLING

We know the mantra: reduce, reuse, recycle. Now Luke Bell tells us what we should all know about our rubbish collection.

These days we cannot fail to be aware of the need to recycle, and many of us are keen to do our bit. But there are a lot of question marks over the recycling system in the UK. Why do some councils collect certain recycled waste and others not? What do we do with the stuff they don't collect? How eco-friendly are the methods used in recycling technology? And can we believe the claims stamped across 'recycled' supermarket products? I for one want some answers!

Councils, collections and compost!

I recently relocated from Bristol to Dunfermline in Scotland. I have friends in London and Norwich and some relatives in Birmingham. In all of these places the recycling rules are very different. In some cities the council collection schemes are comprehensive, with colour coded bins and boxes for compost waste, paper and cardboard, tins and cans, glass and plastics. Yet, elsewhere the collection men won't touch your plastic with a barge pole, and your cardboard will be ignored outside your home. Why the inconsistency?

The truth is simple. At present the UK government sets recycling targets but does not specify how those targets should be met. Local authorities can decide on the best schemes for their area. Campaign groups and industry bodies offer analysis, reports and advice on recycling best-practice, but there is no central guidance at present. It could be a good thing to put the power into the hands of the local authorities, since they have more knowledge of issues specific to their area. Tackling the problem of waste within individual communities can heighten public awareness as well as participation, but there needs to be better communication to achieve this. What is important is that we're moving in the right direction, and government targets can help to ensure that.

However, this community-based model inevitably leads to a great deal of variation in the services and facilities provided up and down the country. Investment in recycling facilities is expensive, so many recession-struck councils will stick with established

recycling processes like paper and glass. In more rural areas, the logistics of collection can be more problematic and costly, leading to a more limited collection service. Furthermore, recycling targets set by the government are currently weight-based. This means that councils tend to focus on recycling heavier waste such as glass and metal. What better way for them to meet their targets? Sadly this creates a situation where lighter waste streams like plastics get neglected. Proposals to move away from weight-based targets are in the pipeline but we still have a few years to wait. For further information on waste legislation and recycling collection policies, the recycling guide at www.recycling-guide.org.uk offers lots of useful resources and advice.

Differing recycling methods can mean different collection methods. Some councils practise co-mingled collection, reducing the need for the householder to separate out waste. Research has shown that this can help to boost recycling levels and reduce the number of trips householders make to recycling centres. Both of these factors make the process more energy efficient. However, costs go up as more separation is required at the processing end, and there is an increased risk of contamination. A recycling box can mimic a second dustbin as householders pay less attention to what they put in it. In general, the best option seems to be colour coded bags and wheelie bins, allowing for partial separation of materials by the householder. An invaluable online resource for area-specific recycling information is www.recyclenow.com. Simply type in your postcode to find out exactly what materials can be recycled via collection in your area. Furthermore, an interactive map of nearby recycling centres offers a guide to their services that mop up any leftovers.

To make the recycling process run more smoothly, there are certain things that we can do, like rinse containers to help reduce contamination risks and squashing metal cans as well as plastic bottles to lower recycling volumes and increase energy efficiency. Removing lids and labels from jars and bottles is useful too, though not essential as any non-glass items will be removed in the crushing process. Do remove lids from plastic bottles since they are often made from a different plastic to the main bottle (creating a different melting point, thus contaminating the load). Excessive tape on parcels and envelopes should be taken off, as well as paper clips, staples and the plastic windows on envelopes. Composting is a great way to recycle your waste. Compost bins are available from a range of outlets, including





many local authorities. For as little as £10 you can start to make your own compost. Your compost bin can take all your green and brown waste: tea bags, vegetable peelings, salad leaves and fruit scraps, garden waste, coffee grounds and filter paper, cardboard, egg boxes and shells, and crumpled up paper. Simply chuck it all in and in 6-9 months you'll have beautifully fresh compost for your garden.



production. This could reduce water pollution by 76%, air emissions by 86%, energy usage by 75%, use of fossil fuels by 2 tonnes, and numerous other great savings. It's a no-brainer.

Plastics is the problem child.

Local authorities are reluctant to spend time and money on plastics recycling as it contributes less in helping to meet the government's weight-based recycling targets. To combat this issue, inspirational organizations are now reusing plastics in product manufacturing. Kedel (www.kedel.co.uk) produces a diverse range of products from plastics and, more significantly, it sources the materials locally. Dermot Walch, Kedel director, explained to me how some recycled products in the marketplace have been sourced from one country, manufactured in another and sold on in another country again. The carbon footprint involved in such a process far outweighs the advantages of recycling the product in the first place. "Our ethos is to recycle British plastic, using recycling processes within Britain, to create products for sale in Britain," Dermot explained. Polystyrene currently accounts for around 30% of landfill in the UK and primary production of plastics has a devastating effect on the environment in comparison with recycled plastics.

The recycling process

So what happens to all our recycled waste? Well, after being sorted and separated at a material recycling facility, the waste is sent to a reprocessor. Metals and glass are heated to a high temperature and reprocessed into new products or simply reformed as the same product. Metals can be recycled over and over again without losing any of their useful properties, which begs the question: why create new metals at all? The folks at WasteOnline.org are passionate about improving the recycling level of metals. "Recycling aluminium requires only 5% of the energy and produces only 5% of the CO₂ emissions compared with primary production," they enthuse. "A recycled aluminium can save enough energy to run your television for three hours!"

The statistics are similarly impressive with steel recycling; reducing air emissions by as much as 86% when compared with primary production. Back at the reprocessing plant, plastics are converted into granulate or pellet and then used in the manufacture of a recycled or part-recycled plastic product. Bio-degradable waste is either composted or incinerated at reprocessing plants. Incineration technology is improving, and the heat produced can now be used to generate electricity, making the overall process much more energy efficient.

Paper is pulped, shredded and reformed. Options for utilizing recycled paper are increased by eco-printing companies. When using vegetable oil-based eco-ink (like the ink we use to print *Inspired Times*) the printing process is 100% carbon neutral, so we need to support these eco-printers.

In general, the recycling process is much more energy efficient and environmentally friendly than disposing of waste in landfill. Energy produced in the recycling process can also be utilized. RDF is a type of fuel derived from recyclable material with a high energy content such as paper, plastics, textiles and wood. It can be used alongside other fuels in a variety of processes, such as in cement kilns. New technologies are continually improving energy production from waste. Gasification is a new process where biodegradable waste is decomposed in anaerobic conditions (without oxygen) and can produce hydrogen, methane and oxygen, which can then be used to generate electricity. The technology and processes involved in recycling are evolving and improving continually.

Another way we can all support the recycling industry is in buying recycled goods over non-recycled goods. If recycled steel products become more popular than those made of non-recycled steel, there will be little need to continue with primary

The process used to recycle one tonne of plastic compared with that of primary production uses 66% less energy, 90% less water, 1.8 fewer tonnes of oil and produces an incredible two-and-a-half times less carbon dioxide. So, if you're looking to offset your carbon footprint, purchasing recycled plastic over non-recycled plastic can make a huge difference. Kedel produces everything from garden furniture to compost bins, but an increasingly popular resource is its recycled plastic wood. Because it's plastic it doesn't need to be treated and will not rot, making it perfect for decking and other external surfaces. Due to its low maintenance, many housing associations are starting to use the material. Don't miss Kedel at the Grand Designs Live show in Birmingham (8-10 October) where it will be showcasing a range of its products.

Reuse, renew, resell

When it comes to doing our bit for the environment, recycling is a relatively easy way to help the planet. Shopping wisely, especially when food shopping, and choosing items with less packaging is vital. Altering our consumer habits to help support and encourage the manufacture of recycled equivalents can also have a big effect. But we don't need to just rely on external services and organizations to handle the recycling process, we can recycle ourselves too. Reusing is even better than recycling in terms of environmental impact, so get creative and do your bit. Whether it's making a bird feeder out of a milk carton or using your empty baby wipes box as a first aid kit, there are loads of creative ideas for reusing materials and waste around the home. Check out www.recyclethis.co.uk for some inspiration. You could even sell your unwanted goods at www.ecobees.com.

The reality is, there is no excuse not to recycle and reuse in today's society, otherwise landfill will soon become land-full! ♻️

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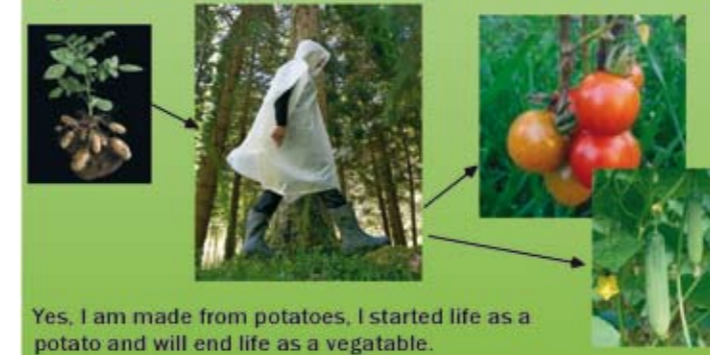
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Yes, I am made from potatoes. I started life as a potato and will end life as a vegetable.

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The result is a 100% biodegradable and compostable rain coat. At the end of my life cycle I convert back into organic matter and return in my entirety to the biosphere, closing the loop. I also teach consumers about this type of biodegradable plastic material, as well as its possible uses and the importance of knowing how to recognize and differentiate between others that are not.

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