

# Free report on waste management in the united kingdom

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Waste generation is a major global problem, as the world's population rises, the quantity of domestic and industrial waste increases. The main strategy employed in waste management is the 3R approach of reduction, reuse and recycling. Environmental experts have suggested the inclusion of recovery to create a 4R strategic approach to waste management (Yearley, 2005a, p 7). The recovery of energy from wastes is a new approach to waste management that maximizes the energy derived from waste and minimizes the final quantity of waste disposed. More needs to be done to find safer approaches to strategic waste management and the improvement of existing technology. For these strategies to succeed there should be more collaboration between the government, public, private organizations and international environmental bodies (Yearley, 2005b, p 50).

### **Waste management performance in the UK**

The United Kingdom was ranked 8 in a European Union (EU) report on waste management. The 27 EU member countries were graded based on 18 criteria for waste management (Bauman, 2007, p 23). Some of the main categories were recycling, cost of waste disposal and recorded infringement of EU legislation on environmental issues. The UK underperformed because of it has failed to reduce the quantity of waste disposed through landfills. The country fared better in municipal waste collection, waste decoupling and existence of recycling incentives. Other commendable areas were disposal of non-hazardous waste and biodegradable wastes.

The latest data on waste production and disposal indicates that household recycling efforts have increased. More people are using simple recycling

procedures in their households. Household recycling rose from 39.7% in the period between April 2009 and March 2010 to 41.5% for the same period in 2010-2011. Household waste production has also been on the decline due to reduced waste generation. This reduction has reduced household waste from 23.5 million or 0.9% between 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 fiscal year.

Recycling has grown in the UK by 30% in the last decade. In 2000, only 115 0f waste was recycled compared to 405 in 2011. However, the UK still consumes 8.3 million tons of food and beverage waste annually. Society should find ways to minimize food wastage which currently stands at 7.0 tones (Stern, 2007, p 102).

In the period between April 2010 and March 2011, the average waste per person has reduced to 449 kg. Out of this, 186 kg was composted, recycled or reused. The remaining 263% was either disposed in a landfill or not properly disposed. The local government the tonnage of waste disposed through landfills. Landfill usage has reduced by 8.8% from 2009/2010 to 11.4 million tons in 2010/2011 fiscal year. The UK compares unfavorably with other EU countries due to its overreliance on landfills. The UK disposes 50% of wastes collected from local authority compared to the 40% of EU countries (Stern, 2007, p 105).

The UK has other waste management strategies for sewage sludge and greenhouse emissions. Waste management systems accounted for 3.2% of greenhouse gas emissions for the UK in 2009. Incineration and landfills contributed 91% to greenhouse gas emissions while waste water accounted for 9%. The treatment of sewage sludge added 1TWh of electricity to the grid

in 2010. If technology is improved and better systems are installed, England could be producing 3 to 5 TWh of electricity by the year 2020(Perry, 2008, p 266).

## **Structure of the Waste Management System**

Waste management services are primarily undertaken by various statutory authorities. Local authorities collect and dispose municipal waste through the Kerbside collection program. The Household Waste Recycling Act which was passed in 2003 requires all local authorities in the UK, to provide each household with bags or bins, for the collection of at least two types of recyclable materials by the year 2012 ( Shirkley, 2011, 54 ).

The waste management system has rewards for appropriate waste collection and punishment for any failure to meet set targets. The regional and national government together with the EU employ financial incentives to encourage local governments to meet their waste management targets. Unfavorable practices such as landfills are discouraged through financial penalties such as a landfill tax (Shirkley, 2011, 59).

Waste disposal authorities (WDA) were established within local authorities to facilitate proper disposal of municipal waste. WDA came into operation after the enactment of the Environmental Protection Act in 1990. WDAs are authorized to use council tax revenues to finance all municipal waste disposal activities. WDAs have the mandate for waste collection and disposal. In unitary authorities, WDA perform both collection and disposal roles.

The city of London through the Mayor's initiatives has set a comprehensive city-wide program for waste management. The municipal waste management strategy has individual targets for waste reduction for the city whose waste generation is projected to hit 26.5 million metric tons in 2020. These recycling targets are statutory requirements for the London Plan. The actual implementation process is conducted by waste management authorities at regional and local levels.

The Kerbside waste collection scheme used three color coded collection bags to separate the types of wastes. Blue bags are for paper waste, green boxes are for plastic bottles, aluminum, glass and tins. Garden wastes are thrown into green sacks which are reserved for organic wastes. Recycling within the UK is further boosted by recycling centers and recycling banks located. These centers are used for the collection and the recycling of all recyclable wastes collected from households and industries in the locality.

## **Comparison of UK with other Countries**

There are three major methods of waste management used by EU countries. Countries use a combination of landfills, recycling or composting and incineration. Countries such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Malta and Lithuania landfill more than 80% of its waste materials. These countries fare badly in EU perform poorly in environmental health assessments because land filling is causes additional damage to the environment and contributes to greenhouse emissions. Close examination of the countries that rank among the 10 with the best waste management systems, reveals that

recycling, composting and incineration are most effective in waste disposal (Shirkley, 2011, p68).

The top 5 countries in the municipal waste management list dispose of less than 10% of their waste through landfills. Germany which is one of the most highly ranked countries records less than 5% landfill, about 65% recycling, composting and other recovery methods while 30% of the waste is incinerated.

France, ranked 10th among the 27 EU states, appears to have achieved a balance between the three methods of waste disposal. About 35% of the waste was land filled, 30 % was recycled or composted while 35% was incinerated. This virtual balance makes France a good reference country for the UK which was ranked 14th majorly because it landfills 25% more waste than France. Land filling is not the best method of waste disposal. It should only be used when other methods of disposal are not safe or effective enough. If the UK can borrow a leaf from France and reduce the tonnage of waste disposed through landfills by 20%, the country will be able to increase its ranking, and improve its waste management performance.

## **Waste Management System in France**

France was listed by Forbes as one of the cleanest countries in Europe.

France ratified the Kyoto protocol and has shown tremendous initiative geared towards reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by 5. 2% of the base level of 1990. As proof of its commitment, France shut down the

last coal mine in the country and adopted nuclear power as the main source of electricity.

This has significantly reduced the level of carbon (IV) oxide which is one of the major greenhouse gases.

France has implemented far reaching environmental reforms through legislation to reduce waste in all facets of life. The waste preservation plan which has been in place since 2004 has helped reduce wastage from junk mail and excess shopping packaging among other strategies. The three Rs of waste management have been implemented in France within the framework of European legislation. These policies set out the quality of recycled materials, waste collection channels and management of hazardous waste (Perry, 2008, p 303).

The country has adopted a community approach to environmental policy. The public is highly involved in the process of determining the goals of public hygiene and environmental safety through household recycling, reduction and reuse. These goals are entrenched in law through legislation passed as far back as 1975. The law on elimination and recovery of wastes was first passed in July 1975 and was later amended 17 years later in 1992.

The process of waste management and recovery is categorized under classified installations. This means that such facilities are recognized as potential threats to the overall wellbeing of French citizens. Waste management procedures and practices can affect public and environmental health. Classified installations are required to conduct

environmental impact assessment and health assessment of their operations to guarantee the safety of the environment and the public at large. This ensures all waste management organizations operate with utmost care and consideration for the overall impact of their activities on the environment (Spilsbury, 2009, P 89).

The Environment Grenelle held in the autumn of 2007 established new policy guidelines for waste management in France. This participative governance identified 25 measures for waste production, recycling and disposal procedures. The outcome of this process will help limit household and commercial waste production, waste disposal through landfills and develop better strategies for recycling. These actions align the goals of waste management to those of the EU. The directive established a ranking system for waste treatment in order to identify the most environmentally friendly, and therefore, the most preferable for purposes of reuse, recycling and reduction and recovery of energy.

The first law of Grenelle prioritizes waste reduction as the main goal of waste management. It makes more economic sense to prevent the production of large quantities of waste as opposed to planning for its disposal. All products will be targeted for eco-friendly design which will manage packaging, content and recyclability of any disposable parts throughout the life of the product.

Hazardous waste treatment plants have been prioritized in the planning process to ensure control and monitoring of each step of the waste



treatment and elimination process. The planning process projects future needs for hazardous waste treatment by analyzing available plants projected future needs and expected demographic growth. Each company is expected to present adequate plans for the safe treatment and disposal of clearly identified hazardous wastes, presently and in the future. All waste elimination and treatment sites are subjected to strict regulation and monitoring (Spilsbury, 2009, p 107). All hazardous wastes are traceable from the point of origin to the point of disposal. France uses a revised version of the 15 point danger criteria for properties developed under the 2008/98/EC directive. France has improved this list by using a methodological nomenclature for hazardous waste identification.

### **Lessons from France**

The UK should start by shifting its focus from waste management to waste prevention. Waste prevention programs should target both household and industrial waste producers. The public should receive practical information on how to reduce their waste generation in their household. These campaigns should encourage complete reuse of reusable materials, reduction of food and beverage wastage through portion control, increased use of recycled and eco-friendly materials and the use of public transport systems to reduce unnecessary air pollution from private transport.

Industrial waste production should be carefully monitored by the government. Environmental health impact assessments should be conducted regularly to ascertain that industries operate safely within the environment. Additionally, manufacturers should be encouraged to produce and sell eco-

friendly materials for consumers. Large distribution chains such as supermarkets should find alternatives for unnecessary plastic packaging which contribute significantly to solid wastes. Manufactures should be directly accountable for the end result of their products to the environment. Like France, the UK could control plastic packaging and regulate the quality of electronic devices for imported and locally produced goods.

France has achievements in the management of waste production, clean energy and greenhouse emissions are achievable by the UK. The strides made by France can also be made in the UK without radical changes on the existing system. UK could start by setting annual goals for the reduction of landfill waste disposal. The country can also invest in new research and technology that will utilize the 4R strategies of waste management. All stakeholders in conservation should shift focus from waste management campaigns and consolidate efforts behind waste prevention strategies. Individual citizens should be empowered to take more responsibility for their waste generating activities, in addition to learning simple reuse, recycling and reduction methods.

The UK should show more commitment to the Kyoto Protocol by working to achieve the 4. 2% collective emissions level set for Annex I EU parties for the period from 2008-2012. The target groups should be both household and industrial contributors of greenhouse gases. This can be done by encouraging the public to use public transport instead of private means and industries to utilize green sources of energy such as nuclear power, solar power and wind power.

Despite their commendable performance in the EU environmental rankings, France has not been able to get the public to use the public transportation system. Many French citizens prefer to use their personal cars even for small errands. Many cite lack of comfort as the main reason why they prefer private transport. France should correct this by making public transport more comfortable, cost efficient and convenient for the public to use. To achieve this, France has implemented several improvements on the transport system by introducing super-fast trains and bicycle programs for road users. To reduce the number of private cars on the road, the government introduced higher taxes to discourage the purchase of cars.

## **Conclusion**

The United Kingdom requires a fresh approach to waste management. The first strategic step would be to shift the focus of the society towards management of waste generation to acceptable levels. At the moment, the city of London alone produces 17million metric tons of waste annually. Secondly, the UK should limit the use of landfill for waste disposal. This move will reduce the level of pollution caused by landfills and increase the use of alternative, environmentally friendly disposal methods such as recycling, reusing and reduction. Finally, the UK should regulate the production, distribution, consumption and disposal of potentially harmful goods. Industrial packaging, imported electronic devices and inefficient power systems are all sources of environmental wastes which can be regulated. If all these strategies are developed and implemented within the necessary

legal and financial frameworks, UK's record of waste management and environmental conservation will improve significantly.

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