

Greater consistency in household recycling collections in England: the benefits to materials reprocessors

Significant progress in recycling in England has been made in recent years with the quantity of material recycled, more than doubling in a decade resulting in strong growth in the recycling sector. Today the recycling sector contributes around £3 billion in gross value added to the UK economy. However, the recycling rate has stalled and services and performance vary across England. Through the delivery of greater consistency in recycling, there are opportunities for significant benefits.



Potential benefits over an 8 year transition period 2018/19 to 2025/26 are:

- Up to **11.6 million tonnes** of additional material recycled by 2025, over 70% of which is food waste;
- Up to **£478 million of materials** returned to the economy;
- Up to **£33m in reduced costs to reprocessors** from not having to remove contamination from materials before processing;
- Greater **householder engagement** and reduced confusion over what can be recycled locally leading to increased participation, higher yields and **better quality recyclate**;
- Up to **8 million tonnes of organic fertiliser** available to the agri-sector, with a nutrient value of £30 million; and supplying around 682,000 homes with renewable energy generating **sales of up to £280 million** a year.

The Framework for greater consistency

An expert advisory group, brought together by WRAP, has developed a [Framework for greater consistency in household recycling](#) in England. It is underpinned by this vision:

“By 2025, packaging is designed to be recyclable, where practical and environmentally beneficial, and is labelled clearly to indicate whether it can be recycled or not. Every household in England can recycle a common set of dry recyclable materials and food waste, collected in one of three different ways.”

Multi-stream with separate food

 or  **Residual waste (up to a maximum equivalent of 120 litres weekly)**

Minimum of 120 litres collected weekly

 **Plastics, metals and cartons**

 **Glass and card***

 **Paper**

 **Food**

 **Plastics, metals, cartons, glass, card, paper and food**

Two-stream (fibres separate) with separate food

 or  **Residual waste (up to a maximum equivalent of 120 litres weekly)**

Minimum equivalent of 120 litres weekly

 **Plastics, metals, cartons and glass**

 or  **Paper and card**

 **Food**

 **Plastics, metals, cartons, glass, card and paper**

 **Food**

Co-mingled with separate food

 or  **Residual waste (up to a maximum equivalent of 120 litres weekly)**

Minimum equivalent of 120 litres weekly

 or  **Plastics, metals, cartons, glass, paper and card****

 **Food**

 **Plastics, metals, cartons, glass, card and paper**

 **Food**

*Glass and card would be presented in the same box but separated into different compartments on the vehicle. In flatted properties card and paper could be collected together. Glass would be collected as a separate stream.

** The advice from reprocessors is that glass and paper are collected separately to maintain material quality.



What are the business benefits?

Reduced costs.

The Resource Association estimates that contamination costs UK reprocessors a minimum of £51 million each year. Greater consistency in materials collected will help to reduce contamination from non-target materials which in turn will reduce costs to reprocessors of 'cleaning up' or removing contamination from sorted materials prior to reprocessing. These costs potentially could be reduced by up to **£33 million (over 8 years)** if all local authorities collected multi-stream.

Business opportunities.

13.2 million more householders would have access to a food recycling collection scheme and 11 million more householders would be able to recycle the core set of dry materials.

At a national level, this could result in an additional **11.6 million tonnes** being recycled, over 70% of which would be food

waste. Up to 8 million tonnes of organic fertiliser would be available, with a nutrient value of **£30 million** and around **682,000 homes** could be generated through the renewable energy.

Better quality through improved communications.

Greater consistency provides increased opportunities for consistent communications, including labelling of packaging to indicate recyclability. This will help to increase capture of recycle and **reduce contamination.**

Achieving greater consistency across England

As outlined in the *Framework*, greater consistency is a long-term goal and can only happen with action across the supply chain.

Already, industry-led groups have been established to:

- Help improve the recyclability and sorting of packaging;
- Improve communications with householders to maximise recycling; and

- Consider the implications to recycling infrastructure – what is going to be needed, and where.

WRAP is working with industry to establish clear guidelines on specific items that can and can't be presented for recycling and how to present them e.g. lids on/lids off and rinsed.

In addition, Defra is undertaking a review of policy and regulations that might affect the delivery of greater consistency.

Supporting greater consistency

Achieving greater consistency will require the support of the UK re-processing sector. When national guidelines are published that outline what items can and cannot be presented for recycling it will be important for the sector to work towards them in collaboration with local authorities and waste management companies.

The *Framework* takes account of current waste composition, service provision and technology as well as regulations and will be kept under review in the light of any future changes.

Find out more

[A Framework for greater consistency in household recycling collections](#) . An overview of the vision and collection systems.

[Supporting evidence and analysis \(link\)](#). The business benefits of adopting greater consistency.



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