

Simpler recycling collections and tougher regulation to reform waste system

3 years ago



Reforms to household and business bin collections and a crackdown on unscrupulous waste carriers will boost recycling rates and protect the environment, the Government announced today.

A new, simpler common-sense approach to recycling means people across England will be able to recycle the same materials, whether at home, work or school, putting an end to confusion over what can and can't be recycled in different parts of the country.

Weekly collections of food waste will also be introduced for most households across England by 2026 – ending the threat of smelly waste waiting weeks for collection and cutting food waste heading to landfill. This will also stop a trend towards three- or four-weekly bin collections seen in some local authorities across the UK, particularly in Wales.

The government is proposing new exemptions to make sure that waste collectors will be able to collect dry recyclables together, in the same bin or bag, and collect organic waste together, to reduce the number of bins required.

As previously confirmed by the Prime Minister, the new plans for simpler recycling will make sure that households will not need an excessive number of bins. The reforms will bring in a more convenient and practical system which prevents councils from being hit with extra complexity, while making sure all local authorities collect the required recyclable waste streams: glass; metal; plastic; paper and card; food waste; and garden waste.

This means manufacturers can design packaging and know it can be recycled across the nation, ensuring there is more recycled material in the products we buy and allowing the UK recycling industry to grow.

Environment Secretary Therese Coffey said: “Simpler recycling will help us all recycle more easily, doing our bit to help save the planet and make the best use of precious resources that we use every day.

“Alongside weekly food waste collections, we are ending the postcode lottery of what you can put in your bin so that wherever you live in the country, you will be able to recycle the same products with confidence.”

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said: “Our ambitious plans will help every household, business, school and hospital in the country to recycle more. We have listened to councils and come up with a system that will increase recycling in a way that does not clutter our pavements with numerous bins and smelly food waste collections for weeks, making recycling simpler and more effective.

“This will help us to make the most of our finite and precious resources, while reducing carbon emissions and protecting our precious environment from harmful waste.”

The plans will help ensure that households benefit from frequent and comprehensive rubbish and recycling collections wherever they live across England, with the new weekly food waste collections and the proposal to include in guidance an expectation that residual rubbish is collected at least fortnightly, helping avoid long waits for smelly waste to be removed. Government will also work with local authorities to assess the collection of residual waste more frequently, especially in urban areas.

Paul Vanston, Chief Executive of the Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment (INCPEN), said: “INCPEN’s recent citizens surveys show there is huge public support for the idea of clear, unambiguous recycling instructions on packaging that match-up with what can be put into household recycling bins wherever citizens live across the whole country.

“Today’s announcements move us several steps closer to turbo boosting the country’s packaging recycling rates on metals, paper and card, glass, hard and soft plastics and cartons whilst enabling citizens to be super-confident when applying simpler recycling behaviours at home and at work in future.”

Margaret Bates, Managing Director at On-Pack Recycling Label Ltd (OPRL), said: “This announcement is a prompt and clear message that will make planning and operations more efficient for local authorities, packaging producers, brands and waste managers.

“Defra has clearly worked hard to clarify the detail of Simpler Recycling as quickly as possible and this statement should be a welcome assurance for local authorities and wider industry.”

Claire Shrewsbury, Director of Insights and Innovation at WRAP, said: “We welcome Defra’s announcement on Simpler Recycling and the inclusion of the six key materials and universal food waste collections for England.

“It’s encouraging that more than 2.2 million businesses will now be required to separate their waste for recycling.”

UKHospitality Chief Executive Kate Nicholls said: “Simplifying recycling in this way will make it far easier for hospitality businesses to recycle even more and ensure we’re being as sustainable as possible.

“Recycling rates across the sector are already strong, with the vast majority of single-use plastics having

been eliminated and food waste consistently on its way down and we're pleased to work with the Government to continually improve the recycling systems for businesses."

Gavin Graveson, Senior Executive Vice President Northern Europe Zone at Veolia, said: "Today's simpler recycling announcement is a welcome step forward to improve the quantity and quality of material that we process.

"We now need to quicken the pace of UK recycling rates by ensuring that packaging is designed to be reused, repaired or recycled."

The plans will apply to all homes in England, including flats. Similar measures will apply to non-household municipal premises, including businesses, hospitals, schools and universities.

In addition to these measures, the Government will continue to drive forward efforts to make waste collections simpler across the country by launching a four-week consultation on expanding the definition of non-household municipal premises – so that places of worship, prisons, charity shops and residential hostels could also be covered by the rules.

These plans will be supported by a major new effort to clamp down on untrustworthy waste operators and ensure that our waste ends up where it's supposed to be. This includes increasing background checks for firms who move or trade waste, to make it harder for rogue operators to find work and easier for regulators to act against criminals. Plans to overhaul the current system for tracking how waste is handled will also improve the way data is currently collected, strengthening regulators' abilities to detect waste crime through a new system for digital waste tracking which will record information from the point it is produced to the point it is disposed of – giving them the evidence they need to hold criminals to account.

Steve Molyneux, Deputy Director of Waste Regulation at the Environment Agency, said: "Inappropriately managed waste can have a terrible impact on local communities and nature and undermines investment in the UK by responsible businesses. That's why we are working to stop waste crime, which is estimated to cost the economy in England £1 billion per year.

"Reforming the licensing system for carriers, brokers and dealers and introducing mandatory UK-wide digital waste tracking will support people to do the right thing by disposing of their waste correctly.

"We are determined to keep one step ahead of the criminals – those acting without regard for the harm they cause – to shut them out of the system and move us towards an economy in which there is no space for waste crime."

Today's package builds on wider efforts to increase recycling and reduce waste. New [restrictions on single-use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks, expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers](#) came into force on 1 October in order to reduce plastic pollution and keep streets clean. We are also moving forward with the implementation of our [Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers](#) and our Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging to boost recycling and clamp down on plastic pollution and litter.

We have already introduced a ban on microbeads in rinse-off personal care products, restrictions on the supply of single-use plastic straws, drink stirrers and cotton buds, and our world-leading Plastic Packaging Tax last year.

Meanwhile, our single-use plastic carrier bag charge has successfully cut sales by over 97% in the main supermarkets.