



Briefing 07/27 April 2007

# Household Waste Prevention

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and Email Contacts (Scotland)

CC: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts (England, Northern Ireland and Wales)

Scotland's Action Plan

## **Key issues**

The aim is to stop growth in municipal waste by 2010.

Home and community composting are not waste prevention.

To address the elements of waste from the average household, in order to reduce it

## **1. Introduction**

The average household in Scotland produces just over 1.1 tonnes of waste per year – equivalent to around 540kg per person. Longer-term trends suggest that this has been increasing by around 1.5% - 2% per year over the past 5 years. Good progress is being made towards the Executive's recycling/composting target of 25%, however more needs to be done. There are a number of reasons for this increase such as increased

disposal incomes, more single person households, convenience led lifestyles, fashion trends and the relatively low cost of food. These types of demographic and societal issues are difficult to influence.

Scottish councils have made significant efforts in recent years to increase recycling and composting rates and have now reached around 25%, predominantly through voluntary measures. However, although recycling and composting are better than disposal options such as landfill and incineration, there are still environmental and economic costs related to these activities. Moreover, as waste increases so does the amount of waste requiring recycling/composting to meet targets. Ultimately, it would be far better not to produce the waste in the first place.

A key aim of the National Waste Plan is to stop growth in municipal waste by 2010 then to further reduce it again. Scotland needs to act now if we are to address the current growth rate and to reverse the trend already set. It is imperative that we curb the elements of waste from the average household, which can be reduced, particularly the levels of residential waste being produced which cannot be recycled or composted.

The Scottish Executive jointly issued a consultation on preventing household waste in Scotland in February 2006, which resulted in 170 responses from organisations and individuals. The full report can be viewed at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/166848/0045564.pdf>

Apse welcomes this document if it goes some way to highlight the problems facing Scotland and it is hoped that the actions will be measurable and to build on existing work being done to prevent the escalation of household waste. Prevention includes:

- Strict avoidance – the complete prevention of waste generation by, for example, reducing unnecessary consumption
- Reduction of waste by designing and consuming products which generate less waste

- Product re-use, re-using a product in its original form, for its original purpose or for alternative use
- Qualitative waste prevention by reducing hazardousness of waste

## **2. Product designers and manufacturers**

The design and manufacture of products purchased by householders can impact heavily on what ends up in household bins. Design and manufacture of goods are, however, difficult to influence as many products bought in Scotland are produced abroad. Work to influence design and manufacture products is more likely to be for the long term and may require action at both UK and EU level. A number of initiatives are already being undertaken to minimise waste from products and packaging. Examples of these were outlined during the consultation process e.g. Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP). The results showed that people are supportive of the need to promote eco-design in Scotland. SEPA hope to publish a report by the end of 2007 on the work being done to encourage sustainable design and sustainable products and the impact that work is having on waste in Scotland. This report will also cover further producer responsibility initiatives e.g. for disposal products where a reusable alternative exists. Other APSE briefings on this subject include 07/07 Zero Waste Policies and 07/19 WEEE Regulations.

## **3. Retailers**

It is believed that approximately 500,000 tones of packaging and waste are thrown out by Scottish households each year. The Scottish Executive is already supporting organisations such as WRAP to work with retailers and others as part of the Courtauld Commitment to minimise packaging and food waste. Training for the retail sector on how to reduce waste as well as the use of recycled content in their packaging is urgently needed and APSE would welcome this type of commitment from retailers. If retailers can share this information, then perhaps this would go some way to minimise waste. Retailers have pledged their commitment at management level to support WRAP in achieving its targets of:

- To design out packaging waste growth by 2008

- To deliver absolute reductions in packaging waste by March 2010
- To identify ways to tackle the problem of food waste

The Scottish Executive will continue to work with WRAP, and others to reduce the amount of food waste from Scottish households by 10000 tonnes by 2008 and 15000 tonnes by 2010. This will be done by:

- Piloting a new consumer-facing food use/waste campaign, which raises awareness of both environmental and economic significance of food waste and will provide practical advice to householders on how to avoid wasting the food bought by householders
- Develop smarter packaging which may enable food to be kept for longer or which is more appropriate for particular households
- Work with retailers to develop alternative marketing approaches to reduce the risk of food being wasted
- Work with the Food Standards Agency to improve consumer understanding of food labels

#### **4. Consumers**

Consumer decisions play a central role in determining the amount of household waste that is generated. Perhaps consumers need to understand waste implications of their purchases and know the alternatives to disposing of items, which are still useable. APSE welcomes this approach as without informing consumers of the impacts they are having on the environment caused by excessive waste. Perhaps once this knowledge is in place, retailers may feel the challenge to change their roles as providers of these goods and services.

The majority of retail purchases involve issuing plastic carrier bags but perhaps by reducing the environmental impact of these, this could impact on waste up to approximately 1,000 tonnes per year.

#### **5. What role can Scottish councils play in dealing with waste minimisation?**

Apse believes in the ability of local government and its public partners to drive forward change and improvement from within. It is awaited with great interest any further proposals which are intended to aid in this process, all authorities need to work

in close partnership with each other to ensure that first class local public services remain the highest priority for all.

Local Authorities are well placed to promote household waste prevention. They can engage local communities in raising awareness of waste prevention measures through links with existing groups such as youth groups, parent and toddler groups and pensioner groups. Perhaps a more strategic approach to reuse goods should be taken for items such as furniture, paint and carpets. SEPA are hoping to develop a framework with the Community Recycling Network for Scotland (CRNS) and local authorities by December 2007. This will include actions such as:

- Encouraging the establishment of local waste exchanges
- Improving collection methods for large household items
- Improving reuse facilities at recycling centres
- Ensuring bulky uplift items are put to good use
- Campaigning to discourage householders from putting reusable items into waste bins
- Learn from experiences in other jurisdictions- by sharing best practice
- Encouraging retailers/community sector/social economy organisations to work together

Local authorities have a central role to play in influencing household waste generation. Following recent improvements in relation to the collection of recyclate, many authorities have already moved to fortnightly collections of residual waste (which mainly goes to landfill), as well as supporting work on recycling, this also helps to reduce the overall amount of waste collected, e.g. by encouraging home composting. Local authorities can act as a leader if they have waste as a centre to purchasing and procurement policy.

## **6. Summary**

The Executive state that any moves to introduce direct variable charging for household waste, will not take place prior to consultation. SEPA has commissioned a research study on Direct Variable Charging for Waste, which will examine issues such as enforcement, impact, cost and technologies. Although not household waste, the Scottish Executive has provided local authorities with resources to enable them to carry out audits of their own waste and draw up internal waste prevention plans. If waste can be reduced by around 600 tonnes per local authority and replicated throughout all 32 local authorities, this would suggest a reduction of around 19,200 tonnes.

The major difficulty for local authorities in achieving zero waste is one of waste prevention, because they have little control over the kind of products that are put on the market. In the UK, the debates on waste and products have in the past been kept separate. The waste debate has revolved around meeting targets set by the EU for diverting waste from landfill and for meeting packaging regulations. These targets

have been successful in driving higher recycling, but have not helped to get any serious policy and business grip on waste prevention, or on the nature of products.

The commitment to halt waste growth in the National Waste Plan relates to municipal waste i.e. all waste collected by local authorities. APSE believes that if all local authorities continue to work in partnership to address the non-household element of municipal waste, as well as commercial and industrial waste generally, this should at least help to address wider objectives on Climate Change and Sustainable Development.

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