



APSE Briefing: COVID-19: Household Waste and Recycling Centres Non-Statutory Guidance

All: Contacts in England

For info only: Northern Ireland, Scotland & Wales

1. Introduction

Many APSE member authorities recognise the importance of Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and during the lockdown period APSE members have also reported increases, of up a third, on fly-tipping. Whilst it would be difficult to provide a direct correlation to this and the closure of HWRCs this has been an issue that has been the subject of media attention and Ministerial pleas for HWRCs to re-open.

A survey of APSE member councils found that key issues before HWRCs should be re-opened included:-

- Clarity from Government on how 'trips to the tip' could be consistent with essential journey guidance.
- Maintaining safe distancing at bays.
- Traffic management around sites – a key issue in the initial closures.
- Permit or safe systems to ensure the public do not overwhelm sites once reopened.
- Waste streams that could be accepted dependent upon the re-processors available.

Whilst the non-statutory guidance does not quite address the issues of 'essential journey' it does at least provide some comfort that HWRC staff are not expected to make the judgement on whether a member of the public, making a journey to a HWRC is 'essential' and it reiterates that

“Householders should only take waste to a HWRC if it cannot be stored safely at home and no alternative disposal options are available”. Thus allowing councils to ask the public to make that distinction for themselves before travelling, which will be particularly useful in any social media campaigns around HWRCs.

The non-statutory guidance is as follows:-

This non-statutory guidance is to help local authorities reopen, or to keep open HWRCs. It sets out what may be considered necessary, as well as measures to support the operation of HWRCs with public health measures.

Kerbside residual and recycling collections remain a high priority and provision of other services should not divert from these. See advice to local authorities on prioritising waste collections.

The key principle of this guidance is that human health must be protected, while maintaining safe systems of working.

Householders should only take waste to a HWRC if it cannot be stored safely at home and no alternative disposal options are available.

1. Opening HWRCs

There is no reason in law why HWRCs cannot be open and where possible, local authorities should seek to retain access to HWRC services for their residents to dispose of waste.

The government is not setting a date by which HWRCs should be open. We recognise that the opening of HWRCs will depend on local circumstances and resource availability. A “one size fits all” approach is not appropriate. The decision to open a HWRC remains with the relevant local authority.

There are also legitimate reasons for some HWRCs to remain closed, safety being paramount, including if insufficient staff are available to operate the site safely.

1.1 Rationale for maintaining or re-opening HWRCs

Local authorities are legally obliged to provide places for residents to take their waste by section 51 (1)(b) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Businesses processing recycled materials also rely on HWRCs to provide them with the materials they need to make new products, including fuel for biomass power generation. HWRCs, therefore, provide an important contribution to the economy.

While the vast majority of local authorities are able to maintain essential collection services (recyclable, food, and residual waste), some households are currently generating more waste than they usually would. In most cases this additional waste can be managed safely, either by waiting for the next scheduled collection, or storing the excess waste on their property. However, some households do not have enough space to store unwanted items safely.

The Coronavirus Act (2020) provides the legislative framework and is supported by government guidance including that on stay at home and social distancing. It would be reasonable for residents to undertake a journey to a HWRC if the waste or recycling could not be stored safely at home or disposed of through other legitimate routes such as a dedicated collection. By this we mean that the waste / recycling could not be stored on their property without causing a risk of injury, health or harm to the resident or other members of their household or harm to public health and amenity.

We recognise many local authorities closed HWRCs because it was considered that journeys to them could not be justified alongside “stay at home” advice, however, the law does not require HWRCs to close. Some local authorities have been able to offer dedicated collections for materials that might otherwise have been taken to a HWRC. These services are particularly helpful if HWRCs cannot reopen for any reason. They can also help to manage demand on HWRCs that are open.

HWRC sites are varied, in location, layout, size, and demand. It is therefore for local authorities to determine what measures are needed to safely operate a particular site and many will already be considering plans to re-open where practical. Consideration should also be given to any other legal requirements such as the public sector equality duty. Plans to reopen should include discussions with:

- local police force (about your arrangements for local or site traffic management)
- HWRC contractor and staff and if necessary, provide additional guidance or training for managing sites

- your reprocessors / disposers on arrangements to collect and process materials
- other relevant local partners and stakeholders who should be engaged

A risk assessment should help inform how and when a HWRC could be opened. This should then inform mitigating actions for both the staff / workforce and visitors / householders.

1.2 Necessary journey

Staff working at HWRCs should not be expected to determine if visitors to the HWRCs:

- are making a legitimate journey
- are bringing items that can or cannot be stored safely at home

The police cannot assess what is or is not a legitimate trip to a HWRC, and they will be unable to assist in this respect.

1.3 Materials accepted

Local authorities should determine what materials and services are provided at their HWRCs. Where possible, the range of materials accepted at HWRCs should remain as close to a normal service provision.

Local authorities should work with their service providers to ensure waste can be stored and removed from sites safely. Where possible continue to sort and segregate waste for offtake.

Local authorities should work with producer compliance schemes (whose statutory obligations remain in place) if they intend to accept waste electrical and electronic equipment.

Local authorities should inform residents if it is necessary to limit the materials accepted and provide updates if changes are made in materials accepted.

2. Guidance to help LAs make decisions on opening HWRCs

In order to support and facilitate these local decisions, various types of guidance are available, including but not limited to that listed at the end of this document.

Consideration should be made regarding the health and safety of both the workforce and householders. Since most HWRCs are outdoor environments there is relatively low risk; however, the following should be considered to support safe functioning.

2.1 Workforce:

If a member of staff is vulnerable, extremely vulnerable, or living with a person in these categories, then they should be supported as they follow the recommendations set out in guidance on social distancing and shielding respectively.

The advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone and should be followed wherever possible.

Workplaces need to avoid crowding and minimise opportunities for the virus to spread by maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) between individuals wherever possible. This advice applies both to inside any office/break area, and to where staff may need to interact with householders. Staff should be reminded to wash their hands regularly using soap and water for 20 seconds and particularly after blowing their nose, sneezing, or coughing. Where facilities to wash hands are not available, hand sanitiser should be used. Workers should cover any coughs or sneezes with a tissue, dispose of the tissue in a bin, and immediately wash their hands.

Where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, to manage the HWRC, there should be a consideration as to whether that activity needs to continue for the HWRC to operate. If this activity is required mitigating actions should be taken to reduce the risk of transmission between staff and / or householders. This could include provision of hand sanitiser to supplement hand washing facilities and spacing out of seating area for breaks.

Employees should be reminded to frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using standard cleaning products.

Employees should socially distance and minimise contact with members of the public. HWRCs should implement social distance measures for members for the public, such as disabling alternate parking bays, introducing markings to enable a 2 metre distance between people or other measures as appropriate for the site.

Employees who are unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) should not travel to or attend the workplace.

Any member of staff who develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) (a new, continuous cough and / or a high temperature) should be sent home and stay at home for 7 days from the onset of symptoms. If the member of staff lives in a household where someone else is unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), then they must stay at home in line with the stay at home guidance.

Employees will need your support to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to others.

2.2 The public

Members of the public visiting a HWRC should not include people who are:

- extremely vulnerable and are remaining at home for shielding purposes
- symptomatic with coronavirus (COVID-19)
- in a 14-day household isolation

The full guidance and link to additional materials can be found [here](#).

APSE comment

For many local authorities, including waste disposal authorities, the safety of staff and the public remains paramount. Amongst the HWRCs that have so far been re-opened a number of measures have already been put into place including: -

Staggering visits, using for example, permit systems or odd / even end numbers of car registrations, proof of residency, post codes on specific days, queue walkers, limiting the waste to be disposed of, for example black bag waste only, and traffic management, both in and around the site.

Many councils have operated successful media campaigns / social media explaining to the public the queue times, systems in operation and any restrictions.

Whilst this guidance does not provide a definitive answer to the issue of 'essential journey' it will hopefully provide greater clarity that there is an expectation that the public sensibly manage their journeys to HWRCs and abide by social distancing when they attend.

We are awaiting updates from DAERA , Zero Waste Scotland and the Welsh Government

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