

'We want to do more'

Which? finds out why so many goods that could be recycled end up in landfill

Householders keen to recycle are prevented from doing more because of a lack of facilities and the need for better information, Which? has found.

We questioned nearly 2,400 Which? members and found that more than four in 10 were confused about what they can and can't leave out to be recycled from their doorstep. A similar number were unaware of what type of plastics they can recycle in their doorstep collection.

Millions of tonnes of household rubbish are thrown out every year, but people are clearly willing to do something about this. We found that 98% of con-

sumers recycle some household waste. One in three would recycle more if their council collected more types of items.

Recycling saves energy by not having to process raw materials. This means that less of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming are produced.

It's estimated that the current UK level of recycling saves more than 18 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) a year, the equivalent of taking five million cars off the road.

How much are we recycling?

We recycle more of our household rubbish than ever. Just eight years ago,



around 10% of household rubbish in England was recycled. The latest annual figures show that around 30% of household rubbish in England is recycled or composted (in Scotland the rate is slightly lower). Every council is given a strict target for what percentage of rubbish it must recycle, and faces big fines for putting too much waste in landfill.

More information needed

We also asked more than 400 Which? members in six council areas (Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Leeds, the London Borough of Lewisham and Liverpool) about recycling services where they lived.

■ One in three thought their council should provide more information about what can be recycled and where. Half thought there was a need for better services for recycling plastics.

■ There was confusion about what can be collected. Bristol and Cambridge councils collect food waste. In Cambridge, 27% of people were unaware of this; in Bristol, 3%. More than half of people in Lewisham and Liverpool thought their council collected shredded paper at the doorstep. Neither does.

■ In Bristol, 44% of people would recycle more if extra items were collected from doorsteps; 20% in Cardiff would.

RECYCLING SYMBOLS ARE RUBBISH

These symbols are supposed to be a simple way of letting you know what packaging can be recycled. But do you know what they mean?



1 It means capable of being recycled, not that the packaging had already been recycled.



2 You'll find this on electronic items in the EU. More than seven in 10 members thought it meant they weren't allowed to place the product in their bin. In fact, this symbol, the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment symbol, is simply to

discourage you from throwing out such products. It's the retailer that must ensure they're disposed of.



3 Four in 10 members thought this symbol indicated that the item could be recycled where facilities exist. It's simply to show what material the product is made of – polyethylene terephthalate, a type of plastic.



The British Retail Consortium and the Waste & Resources Action Programme have launched symbols to offer simpler information on how many people can access recycling facilities (left to right, above): **Widely recycled** means 65% of people have access to recycling facilities for these items. **Check locally** means 20%-65% of people have access to recycling for these. **Not currently recycled** means 20%-65% of people have access to recycling for these. The scheme is backed by shops including Asda, M&S and Tesco.

'LET ME RECYCLE THESE'

Lynn Jenkins, 65, retired

Lynn Jenkins faithfully puts out paper, cans and plastic bottles to be recycled.

Lynn, who lives near Hastings in East Sussex, is keen to recycle more, and is disappointed her council, Rother District, won't accept items such as cardboard, glass and tinfoil on the doorstep. Lynn said the council told her that everyone in the area would get a wheelie bin for green waste. She still doesn't know if and when that will be delivered. She composts as much as she can, but her garden is quite large, so she has to dispose of piles of prunings in normal rubbish.

A few miles down the road, people in Wealdon District can put cardboard in garden waste bins and the council accepts foil and aerosol cans.

■ We found 30% of people in Liverpool were unsure where to recycle some items or felt facilities were too far away. This compared with 17% overall.

This is how much councils recycled in practice: Cambridge 39.63%, Bristol 31.94%, Leeds 22.3%, Lewisham 15.75% and Liverpool 12.72% for 2006/7. Cardiff's figure was 26.49% for 2007. All said their rate had improved since.

A Local Government Association (LGA) spokesman said that services differ between areas because transport costs to recycling facilities vary.

He said: 'We appreciate the need for councils to communicate to their residents and expanding recycling services is vital, but those initiatives come with a cost.' He said the LGA wants to see businesses, such as supermarkets, pay part of recycling costs because they're responsible for so much packaging. He said this happens in many European countries. Research for the LGA found 38% of packaging in a household shopping basket can't be recycled.

Supermarkets are often criticised for the amount of packaging used on goods. However, in July we reported on how a lack of council processing facilities meant that packaging that was technically recyclable ended up in landfill.

WHAT YOU CAN RECYCLE

There's a huge variation in what you can recycle, depending on where you live. Here's how to find out more information

Aerosols

If your council doesn't take aerosols as part of your kerbside collection, you may be able to take them to your local recycling centre. Make sure your aerosols are empty and check for your nearest drop-off point at www.recyclenow.com.



Batteries

A lot of councils accept batteries at recycling drop-off points, but very few collect them in kerbside schemes. The website www.recyclenow.com lists places that recycle specific items.



Glass

Most councils will take glass in their kerbside collection but if not, use local bottle banks or local recycling centres. Don't put broken windows, light bulbs, glass ovenware or electrical items in bottle banks.



Paper and magazines

Most councils take newspapers and magazines as part of a kerbside collection service or at recycling banks. But different rules often apply for cardboard, shredded paper, wrapping paper and Yellow Pages, so check with your council first.



Tetra Paks

These are the strong drink cartons used for milk and juice. Very few councils collect these from the kerbside. A new service was launched in 2007 by the carton industry trade body Ace UK to provide recycling across the UK. The website www.tetrapakrecycling.co.uk has a map listing your nearest collection scheme.



OUR RESEARCH

In July and August 2008 we asked 2,400 Which? panel members from around the UK questions including how aware they were of recycling symbols. In a separate survey, we asked 448 Which? panel members in Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Leeds, Lewisham and Liverpool, who have a doorstep collection from their house, about recycling in their area.

Checklist

Some products are easier to recycle than you might think

■ Furniture/white goods

Check whether your council collects these or accepts them at a recycling centre. If you're buying a new white good, the shop may take your old one for recycling or offer you part-exchange. If your item is in good condition, you could advertise it on Community Recycling and Training (www.createuk.com), www.freecycle.org or the Furniture Re-use Network (www.frn.org.uk).

■ **Mobile phones** Shops that sell mobiles sometimes have recycling schemes, but Recycling Appeal collects mobiles and other items to raise funds for charities. See www.recyclingappeal.com.

Another option you can try is www.fones4schools.co.uk, which offers schools the chance to earn cash for collecting old mobile phones.

■ **Paint** You may be able to drop unwanted paint at a council recycling bank or use the Community Repaint scheme which collects unwanted paint for local projects. See www.communityrepaint.org.uk for donation points.

Contacts

GENERAL

Recycle Now www.recyclenow.com
Waste & Resources Action Programme
www.wrap.org.uk

IN LONDON

Recycle for London
recycleforlondon.com

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Wake up to Waste
www.wakeuptowaste.org

IN SCOTLAND

SortIt www.sort-it.org.uk

IN WALES

Waste Awareness Wales
www.wasteawarenesswales.org.uk