

Your Which?



Take action over excess packaging

Which? scientists ensure we commission the best testing for you



James checks on our shredders' test – in the UK

Whether it's New York or Brussels, scientific experts at Which? go a long way to ensure we're testing products with the latest technology and to the highest standards.

Our principal scientific adviser, James Beardon, works with about 20 labs across the globe. This allows us to use those with the most expertise in a particular area and share testing costs with overseas consumer organisations. So much of James's time is spent liaising with partners in the International Consumer Research Testing group.

James says: 'We have a huge network of people with great ideas, expertise and knowledge of labs. But cultural differences are challenging, with each country wanting to focus on different aspects – some on the detail of products, others on safety, for example.

So compromise and communication are key.'

He adds: 'I'm supporting work on a database to allow countries to share results online. This means we'll be able to download those most relevant to Which? readers.'

James advises on the technical aspects of tests he oversees, from choosing labs to helping researchers define testing programmes.

For example, for our golf clubs report last year, there was a lot of work finding the right lab (in the US) and deciding that robots would be the best tools for some tests.

And physicist James says that while many products are tested regularly, keeping up with how gadgets are developing and being used is one of his main challenges: 'While Which? always sticks to its principles of robust research, the work I do here is forever changing and it keeps me thinking.'



When buying a DVD player recently, I was staggered by its unrecyclable, excess packaging.

In the UK, 100,000 tonnes of plastic bags are dumped each year. Packaging and plastic bags in landfill can take 500 years to decay, releasing greenhouse gases in the process.

Manufacturers and retailers might justify their packaging, saying it's due to consumer demand, but some are attempting to tackle the problem.

Compostable materials, biodegradable packaging and carrier bags and higher proportions of recycled material are being used more regularly.

But as long as such initiatives are voluntary and experts dither about their success, progress will remain slow. And it's you, the shopper, who's left frustrated with the lack of guidance and support available to help you do your bit for the environment.

In the coming months, we'll help give you greater control over how much excess packaging you pay for by targeting key industry figures and debates on these issues.

I dealt with the DVD player's packaging by dumping it at the retailer's till point. You, as consumers, can force industry to take action by doing the same.

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