

Radical plans for waste could herald a big clean-up

Level 3 | **Advanced**

1 Pre-reading | Key Words

There are three main options for dealing with waste. Match the words with the definitions:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1• landfilling | a• burning at very high temperatures |
| 2• incineration | b• treating waste materials so that they can be used again |
| 3• recycling | c• making everything from material that can be repaired, reused or recycled |
| 4• zero waste | d• burying waste in a large hole in the ground |

2 What do you know about waste?

Choose or guess the best answer.

- 1• By the year 2020 how much household waste will be produced each year in Britain?
a• 10m tonnes b• 20m tonnes c• 40m tonnes
- 2• What happens to 80% of household waste in Britain?
a• it is recycled b• it is dumped c• it is burnt
- 3• What kind of waste makes up the largest part of household waste?
a• plastics b• organic material c• paper
- 4• Which kind of waste causes the biggest risk to health?
a• plastics b• organic material c• batteries
- 5• What percentage of waste is difficult or expensive to recycle?
a• 15-20% b• 35-40% c• 75-80%

Now look in the text and check your answers:

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Joanna Collins

Many local authorities are in a deep hole over waste. With the amount of household rubbish set to double by 2020 to more than 40m tonnes a year, and new European Union directives insisting that countries significantly reduce landfilling, the incineration option looks attractive, but is proving politically and financially difficult. Many local authorities around the world are turning to a system called zero waste, which would abolish landfills and reduce dramatically the need for incinerators.

The premise is that everything we buy is, or eventually will be, made from materials that can be repaired, reused or recycled. So governments, councils and industry should be working together to find ways to turn waste into a profitable resource or designing it out of the system altogether. Canberra, Toronto, California and, lately, New Zealand - where 45% of all local authorities have signed up to zero-waste policies - are convinced enough to make it a target to be reached by 2015 or earlier.

In Britain, Bath and Northeast Somerset council is the first authority to have adopted the zero-waste vision. Others

are now following. "Zero waste is, to me, a grassroots movement from local authorities and people," says Bath councillor Roger Symmonds. He was won over to the concept two years ago at a conference in Geneva, where New Zealand authorities that had taken the plunge recounted their experience. "The word 'zero' is not strictly accurate," he cautions. "It may not be achievable. But if we get anywhere near, then the benefits for health and jobs will be enormous."

Where Britain currently recycles 11% of household waste, burns 8% and dumps the rest, within six years of a change in policy Canberra is recycling 59% of its rubbish and Edmonton, Canada, has reached 70%. Surprisingly, organic waste makes up the bulk of a bin-load and causes the nastiest health risk when it rots and leaks from landfills. In many cases the high-achieving cities and councils have introduced three-stream collection, separating organics, dry recyclables such as bottles and plastics, and tricky residuals such as batteries. According to Robin Murray, a leading zero-waste economist in Britain, as soon as this is done "they find suddenly that they are recycling more than 50%".

There's money to be made, too, say the zero-waste proponents. In a US survey of high recycling programmes, savings were made in 13 out of the 14 cases. Resource recovery facilities and exchange networks were found to be turning waste into an asset, creating small business opportunities and employment in struggling communities. This has been a key factor in New Zealand, where zero waste is regarded more as a driver of local economic development than a matter of environmental conscience. "It's very much a case of the people led and the government followed," says Warren Snow, of the New Zealand Zero Waste Trust. "It's a quiet revolution where non-profit community groups are turning waste into jobs."

Radical thinking about waste is seen to be essential. When it comes to the 15%-20% of waste that is difficult or expensive to recycle, zero waste proposes a new way of looking at the problem: anything that cannot be recycled or reused should be designed out of the system. Industry is seen as a key player in this system. "The multinationals are on to this far quicker than governments or environmental groups," says Mr Murray. Many large companies, he says, already foresee the arrival of legislation that makes producers take responsibility for what happens to their products at the end of the life cycle.

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3 Comprehension Check

Match the beginnings with the endings:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1• Many local authorities are turning to the zero waste option because | a• believe that zero waste can be achieved within 15 years. |
| 2• Zero waste is based on the idea that everything | b• now recycles 70% of its waste. |
| 3• Authorities in the USA, Australia and New Zealand | c• it can create small business opportunities. |
| 4• Even a partial conversion to zero waste policies | d• landfilling has to be reduced and incineration is politically unpopular. |
| 5• The Canadian city of Edmonton | e• it can rot and leak from landfill sites. |
| 6• Organic waste can cause health problems because | f• to design it out of the system. |
| 7• Zero waste can help local economies because | g• is made from materials that can be repaired, recycled or used again. |
| 8• The solution to the problem of the 15-20% of waste that cannot be recycled is | h• would bring enormous benefits for health and jobs. |

4 Vocabulary Work: Reformulation

Fill the gaps using an appropriate word from the text. You may need to change the form of the word.

- 1• The amount of household waste is expected to _____ by the year 2020.
- 2• Zero waste would lead to the _____ of landfills.
- 3• There would also be a dramatic _____ in the need for incinerators.
- 4• Zero waste is based on the _____ that everything can be repaired, reused or recycled.
- 5• It may not be possible to _____ 100% zero waste.
- 6• At present only 11% of household waste in Britain is _____.
- 7• Health risks are _____ by organic waste leaking from landfills.
- 8• The _____ of organics, dry recyclables and residuals is known as three-stream collection.
- 9• Waste can be _____ into an asset through resource recovery facilities.
- 10• New legislation could mean that producers will be _____ for what happens to their products at the end of the life cycle.

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5 Find the word

Find the word or expression which means:

- 1• to be in a very difficult situation
- 2• to officially get rid of a law, system or practice
- 3• a principle that ideas and actions are based on
- 4• to persuade someone to agree with you
- 5• to finally do something difficult or dangerous after thinking about it
- 6• someone who publicly supports an idea, policy or plan
- 7• a major benefit
- 8• a person or organisation that influences a situation

6 Discussion

Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of incineration, landfilling and recycling.
Do you think zero waste is achievable?
What products are particularly bad for the environment?

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Key

1 Key Words

1 d; 2 a; 3 b; 4 c

2 What do you know about waste?

1 c; 2 b; 3 b; 4 b; 5 a

3 Comprehension Check

1 d; 2 g; 3 a; 4 h; 5 b; 6 e; 7 c; 8 f

4 Vocabulary Work: Reformulation

- 1 double
- 2 abolition
- 3 reduction
- 4 premise
- 5 achieve
- 6 recycled
- 7 caused
- 8 separation
- 9 turned
- 10 responsible

5 Find the word

- 1 to be in a (deep) hole
- 2 to abolish
- 3 a premise
- 4 to win someone over (to something)
- 5 to take the plunge
- 6 a proponent
- 7 an asset
- 8 a key player