

Introduction

In 2007, Vision 21 in partnership with the University of Gloucestershire, Parklife and Cheltenham Borough Council carried out a 'Survey into the Cheltenham Business Community's Action on Waste and Energy Use'. Of the companies surveyed, 71% said they recycle at least one waste product. The most commonly recycled materials were paper (39%) and cardboard (42%). Only 3% of companies recycled glass, wood (not including pallets) and electrical goods, whereas 14% recycled plastic and 10% pallets. It is interesting that these proportions are similar to a survey of Oxfordshire business waste. It was surprising that the most significant waste items that were destined for skips almost mirrored the percentage figures for each item, with the exception of plastic whose disposal rate was three times that of recycling plastic.

The survey found that 80% of companies would be willing to work together to reduce their waste. All companies surveyed operated from trading estates, which makes working together easier.

Why Recycle?

As this is written by a sustainability charity you will not be surprised to hear that the first reason is the environment. There is far less energy involved in recycling a component than to manufacture it from raw material. Typically this figure is 90% with an aluminium can. Aluminium is made from bauxite ore which is mined, for example, in Indonesia, in what was once rainforest – the loss of which causes vast greenhouse gas emissions. Energy is primarily derived from fossil fuels and burning fossil fuels produces carbon dioxide which causes global warming. We live on a finite planet and those raw materials are becoming scarce or going up in price as China competes for commodities. In theory recycled produce should be cheaper as it contains less energy (oil has doubled in price in a year) and you already have the material to re-work.

The second reason to recycle is money, although this also involves our environment. Landfill is becoming full. To discourage waste going to landfill and encourage recycling or re-use (which is better) or reduction (which is best) the cost of landfill is becoming ever more expensive. Landfill tax is currently £32 per tonne but this will increase to at least £48 per tonne. There is also additional money to be made from recycling as other companies will buy your waste to recycle, which is cheaper than buying new.

Some Facts and Figures

According to Grundons: 13 billion steel cans are produced each year – a quarter of this steel has been recycled. (This is a lot of pet food and baked beans and the extent of this figure might encourage us to buy less processed food which means less embedded energy). Recycling a tonne of paper saves almost 13 trees. It also saves 2.5 barrels of oil, 4100kWh of electricity, 4 cubic metres of landfill and 31,780 litres of water. Every year we need a forest the size of Wales to provide the paper we use in Britain. Plastics can take up to 400 years to break down in a landfill. 56 % of recycled PET finds a market in the manufacture of carpet and clothing. The energy saved by recycling 1 bottle will power a computer for 25 minutes.

According to Biffa, at 50% the UK currently has one of the lowest glass container recycling rates in Europe. Pubs, clubs and restaurants throw away over half a million tonnes of glass bottles each year of which no more than 10% gets recycled. Perhaps we should go back to drinking out of glasses and even support local real ale.

This website from recycle-more gives a very thorough review of what and how a myriad of materials can be recycled and details on legal obligations:

<http://www.recycle-more.co.uk/nav/page519.aspx>.

Local Waste Recycling Contractors

Cheltenham Borough Council – Are currently reviewing their approach to commercial waste. They collect mainly glass with some paper and card and are working with a partner to expand this service throughout the town:

<http://tinyurl.com/57ztm5>.

Biffa – Offers special containers to make segregation of waste intended for recycling easier. They can recycle: paper, glass, cardboard, fluorescent tubes, cans, plastic, wood and construction and demolition waste. Please see:

<http://www.biffa.co.uk/content/services/recycling>.

Grundons – Can recycle or pass on to those who can, a mind-boggling array of unwanted goods that used to end up on landfill. As well as the above amongst other things they can also recycle: aerosols, batteries, computers, fire extinguishers, flammable and chlorinated solvents. For full list, please see:

<http://www.grundon.com/whatWeDo/whereAreYouGloucester.htm>.

AVM – Recycles cardboard, paper and plastic. They offer customers dedicated wheelie bins at £7.00 each for each material. Alternatively businesses can bring these three items to a free-tip at AVM's premises or can be paid for cardboard at the following rates: 0.25 tonne - £5.00; 0.5 tonne - £10.00; 1 tonne - £20.00. Please see:

<http://www.avmgroup.co.uk>.

Valpak Recycling – Is just over the border in Stratford and offer a full consultancy service on waste and recycling. Valpak also has experience in shipping waste abroad for recycling, which has received adverse publicity because of what actually happens to it in China and India, where it can have a very detrimental affect on their environment. Their literature explains that they have the knowledge in this marketplace to export responsibly and comply with the necessary regulations and legislation:

<http://www.valpak.co.uk>.

Sort and compact waste - Mil-tek sell a range of waste presses, which reduces space (containers & bins) devoted to waste on-site which means that you can reduce pick-ups (which reduces on emissions). This reduces the handling cost of your waste and will aid in obtaining an income from your sorted waste. As so many of Cheltenham businesses told us they were willing to work together, from a pay-back point of view, it might make sense for a number of adjacent smaller units to club together to purchase a press and so all benefit from the savings that can be made. Please see:

<http://www.miltek.co.uk>.