



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Policy paper

Simpler Recycling in England: policy update

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Applies to England

Contents

Ministerial foreword

New default requirements

Supporting our circular economy strategy

Timelines

Updated position on co-collection of recyclable waste streams

Confirmed position on timeline for micro-firms implementation

Guidance on residual waste collections

Next steps



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Ministerial foreword

For too long, households in England have been presented with a muddled and confusing patchwork of approaches to bin collections. This policy statement sets out the government's approach to delivering Simpler Recycling in England, subject to spending review outcomes.

This government inherited legislation that could have required households to have up to 7 bins, placing an unnecessary burden on people and businesses. We are simplifying the rules to make recycling easier for people in England, while stimulating growth and maximising environmental benefits.

Simpler Recycling will enable consistent, more streamlined collections from all households, businesses and relevant non-domestic premises (such as schools and hospitals).

Local authorities and other waste collectors will be able to co-collect some waste streams by default meaning that they will no longer need to collect 7 separate streams.

These common-sense changes will not lead to the proliferation of bins but will ensure the same set of materials are collected everywhere in England.

New default requirements

The new default requirement for most households and workplaces will be 4 containers for:

- residual (non-recyclable) waste
- food waste (mixed with garden waste if appropriate)
- paper and card
- all other dry recyclable materials (plastic, metal and glass)

These may be various container types, including bags, bins or stackable boxes.

This is the government's maximum default requirement and is not expected to increase in the future. However, councils and other waste collectors will still have the flexibility to make the best choices to suit local need. This is a sensible, pragmatic approach to the collection of materials for every household and business in England.

We will make recycling easier: citizens will be able to recycle the same materials across England whether at home, work or school, and will no longer need to check what is accepted for recycling in their local area. A universal standard will ensure that everything that can be collected for household recycling is collected in every region.

Simpler Recycling will also end the 'postcode lottery' of bin collections in England whereby councils collect different materials for recycling, causing confusion for households. We will maintain flexibility for local authorities to deliver these changes in the most appropriate way for their area. We have published guidance for local authorities and other waste collectors (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/collecting-paper-and-card-with-other-dry-recyclable-materials-written-assessments>) to support their decision-making regarding the co-collection of paper and card with other dry recyclable materials.

Through Simpler Recycling, all householders will receive a comprehensive and consistent set of waste and recycling services. This will enable householders to recycle as much waste as possible and to frequently dispose of bad-smelling food waste, which will be collected from all households at least weekly.

We recognise that as recycling services are expanded and improved, local authorities may want to review residual waste services to ensure they are providing best value for money in line with local need. The government's priority is ensuring that households' needs are met, and we expect local authorities to continue to provide services to a reasonable standard, as they do now. Defra has published guidance on household waste collections (<http://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-good-waste-collection-services-for-households>) to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review services, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained.

The government will progress the delivery of this policy, providing clarity to enable investment in UK recycling and a substantial contribution to emissions savings for the waste sector. This policy statement sets out the government's position on several exemptions, which will be implemented by an affirmative statutory instrument (SI) in December 2024. The timing of this statement ahead of that SI is to provide more time for businesses and local authorities to prepare.

Supporting our circular economy strategy

The government is committed to moving towards a zero waste, circular economy. This will create a future where:

- we keep our resources in use for longer and reduce waste
- we accelerate the path to net zero
- we see investment in critical infrastructure and green jobs
- our economy prospers
- nature thrives

To do this we are building a circular economy strategy and a series of sector-based roadmaps for reform. This will include a long-term roadmap for the packaging sector.

Simpler Recycling in England will be an essential part of this mission. Alongside Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/extended-producer-responsibility-for-packaging-who-is-affected-and-what-to-do>) and the Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/introduction-of-a-deposit-return-scheme-in-england-wales-and-northern-ireland>), Simpler Recycling will make a significant step towards meeting our ambition to recycle 65% of municipal waste by 2035, and deliver greenhouse gas emissions savings equivalent to £11.8 billion ^[footnote 1].

These reforms will reduce confusion, ending the 'postcode lottery' of bin collections, which will help ensure the correct materials are captured for recycling.

This will improve recycling rates – household recycling rates in England have flatlined at around 44% to 45% since 2015 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-waste-data/uk-statistics-on-waste>). This policy will play a critical role in delivering emissions savings for the waste sector in Carbon Budgets 4 to 6.

Simpler Recycling aims to ensure there is more recycled material in the products we buy, and that high quality recycled material can be sourced domestically, enabling packaging circularity in the UK. It will help to support more than £10 billion investment in the UK's recycling capability over the next decade (<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgreenbusinessjournal.co.uk%2Frecycling-and-waste-management-sector-to-invest-10bn-in-achieving-net-zero-by->

2040%2F&data=05%7C02%7CDaisy.Smith%40defra.gov.uk%7C195939b867e44813dce108dc870f3c31%7C770a245002274c6290c74e38537f1102%7C0%7C0%7C638533746706042881%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=hO79K1RdK13ZJqxu9vMtDp4t%2BABOpvVfcWURugKyrvY%3D&reserved=0).

Timelines

The government will deliver these reforms to previously announced timelines, subject to the outcomes of the forthcoming Spending Review.

The implementation timelines for Simpler Recycling are as previously announced:

- by 31 March 2025, businesses and relevant non-domestic premises ^[footnote 2] in England will need to arrange for the collection of the core recyclable waste streams, with the exception of garden waste (glass, metal, plastic, paper and card, and food waste)
- micro-firms (businesses with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees) will be temporarily exempt from this requirement. They will have until 31 March 2027 to arrange for recycling of core recyclable waste streams
- by 31 March 2026, local authorities will be required to collect the core recyclable waste streams from all households in England. This includes introducing weekly food waste collections for most homes, unless a transitional arrangement applies ^[footnote 3]
- by 31 March 2027, kerbside plastic film collections from businesses and relevant non-domestic premises, and households will be introduced

Secondary legislation implementing the policy updates will be laid in December 2024, subject to parliamentary process.

We will continue to work closely with local authorities, businesses, relevant non-domestic premises, the waste industry and producers to support implementation.

Updated position on co-collection of recyclable waste streams

Co-collecting food and garden waste

To maximise flexibility for local authorities and households, we are introducing an exemption to allow the co-collection of food and garden waste. There is no evidence that this would affect their ability to be recycled or composted, since the materials can always be processed through in-vessel composting when mixed.

Co-collecting dry materials

Stakeholder evidence

We have received extensive stakeholder feedback and evidence about plans on the collection of dry materials. The Secretary of State for Defra has concluded, based on the evidence, that:

- there is some evidence to indicate that simplifying the number of bins can help increase participation in recycling, but evidence also suggests that fully co-collecting systems (with one mixed dry recycling bin) have the highest levels of contamination (for example, broken glass stuck on paper or soggy paper from the liquid from bottles and cans), which will affect the recycling rate
- contaminated materials may be rejected after collection if it is not economically viable to re-process them, reducing the amount of material recycled
- paper and card are particularly vulnerable to cross-contamination from food and liquid commonly found on other recycling, which can significantly reduce quality of collected material

Our plan for co-collecting dry materials

Based on this evidence, the Secretary of State for Defra understands that co-collection of plastic, metal and glass presents a lower contamination and material quality risk. The Secretary of State for Defra has concluded that:

- by default, paper and card should be separately collected from all other dry materials so their potential to be recycled is not reduced. According to the latest data from the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), 121 local authorities reported that they already collect paper and card separately from other dry recycling across England ^[footnote 4]
- all other dry materials may be co-collected, as the benefit of simplifying (and thereby potential to increase volumes), offsets the smaller contamination risk. According to the latest WRAP data, 95 local councils

already co-collect plastic, metal and glass in this way across England ^[footnote 5]

- local flexibility to co-collect paper and card with other dry materials remains where separate collection is technically or economically impracticable, or provides no significant environmental benefit. For example, this may be more appropriate for high-rise flats or houses with very limited outside space. Waste collectors will need to produce a short written assessment explaining their decision. Guidance for waste collectors and a template (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/collecting-paper-and-card-with-other-dry-recyclable-materials-written-assessments>) that can be used for this assessment has been published alongside this announcement
- if local authorities and other waste collectors want to offer more separate containers for different types of materials, they will be able to do so without completing a written assessment. In 2022 to 2023, around 41 local authorities in England reported that they currently choose to collect dry materials in more than 2 separate waste containers ^[footnote 6]

This draws on learning from best practice across the UK and internationally. For instance, in Wales, the Collections Blueprint sets out a default standard of 3 dry recycling containers. The 2015 review concluded that the separate collections system results in ‘higher-quality, less contaminated material’, which ‘results in a higher likelihood of material being appropriate for higher value-added closed-loop uses in the UK and Europe ^[footnote 7]. England’s household recycling rate was 44.1% in 2021 ^[footnote 8], so there is significant room for improvement.

This evidence-based pragmatic approach will provide a suitable balance to support environmental outcomes while providing local flexibility and convenience for households.

Confirmed position on timeline for micro-firms implementation

We will proceed with the exemption which means that micro-firms will have until 31 March 2027 to comply with requirements. This provides a realistic timeline for those businesses with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees to make the necessary changes. We recognise there are challenges to these businesses to transition. We will provide advice and support to assist them in complying with the requirements.

Guidance on residual waste collections

As householders will receive comprehensive and consistent recycling services through Simpler Recycling, we expect residual waste amounts to decrease.

Local authorities are already legally required to deliver waste collection services to all households in their area. We have gone further by mandating weekly food waste collections under the Environment Act 2021. Waste collection authorities determine the appropriate approach to residual waste and dry recycling collections in their area.

The government's priority is ensuring households' needs are met with regard to the provision of residual waste and recycling services, so we are writing guidance to support local authorities in making these decisions.

We have published non-statutory guidance for local authorities on factors to consider, within their existing and new legal obligations, to ensure they continue to provide reasonable waste collection services to households, as they currently do.

The guidance on household waste collections

(<http://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-good-waste-collection-services-for-households>) advises local authorities to ensure the following outcomes:

- households receive reasonable residual waste collections (local authorities should consider additional services for particular needs, such as households with medical needs)
- there will be no build-up of bad-smelling waste at kerbside
- changes to collections do not lead to an increase in fly-tipping of residual waste

We expect local authorities to monitor any changes to collection frequencies to ensure there are no unintended adverse consequences.

Next steps

Policies relating to exemptions from the existing legislation are subject to parliamentary approval.

Key upcoming milestones for Simpler Recycling:

- December 2024: lay regulations to confirm exemptions in legislation, subject to parliamentary procedure
- by end of financial year 2024 to 2025: delivery of transitional resource new burdens funding to local authorities for weekly food waste collections for households

Following this announcement, we will work with the sector and provide further guidance and tools to support preparation for Simpler Recycling implementation dates, with a particular focus on the 31 March 2025 deadline for businesses and relevant non-domestic premises.

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1. Simpler Recycling in England (legislation.gov.uk)
(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2024/97/pdfs/ukia_20240097_en.pdf), figure is discounted and in 2023 price base year
 2. Relevant non-domestic premises include residential homes, premises forming part of a university or school or other educational establishment, premises forming part of a hospital or nursing home, and premises of a description specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State.
 3. Where long-term waste disposal (mechanical biological treatment and energy from waste) contracts present a barrier to introducing separate food waste collections, a longer implementation period may be required. Defra will continue to engage with affected local authorities.
 4. WRAP LA portal data as at September 2024. This is local authority reported data.
 5. WRAP LA portal data as at September 2024. This is local authority reported data.
 6. WRAP LA data for 2022/23. This is local authority reported data.
 7. Review of the Welsh Government Collections Blueprint – Eunomia Research and Consulting (<https://eunomia.eco/reports/review-of-the-welsh-government-collections-blueprint/>)
 8. UK statistics on waste - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-waste-data/uk-statistics-on-waste))
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-waste-data/uk-statistics-on-waste>)





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