

Zero Waste Charter

The organisations, groups and individuals who have signed this charter are committed to achieving Zero Waste in the UK by 2020. Zero Waste is a new concept being pioneered by leading corporations, municipalities, and now provincial and national governments. It entails re-designing products and changing the way waste is handled so that products last longer, materials are recycled, or, in the case of organics, composted. Waste is in the process of being designed away.

The immediate imperatives behind the drive for Zero Waste are environmental. There is a new awareness of the dangers to human health of waste landfills and incinerators. Landfills are major producers of methane, and polluters of water tables. Incinerators produce greenhouse gases, and are a source of heavy metals, particulates and dioxins. Zero Waste strikes at the cause of this pollution.

It also lightens the ever growing pressure on the world's forests, soils, and mineral resources by making more with less. Doubling the life of a car saves the 15 tonnes of materials required to make a new one. Recycling paper gives wood fibres six lives rather than one. Increasing the productivity of resources in this way also leads to major savings in energy. Zero Waste will play a central role in cutting CO2 emissions and sequestering carbon in the soil.

There is a further economic dividend. Redesigning production and increasing recycling to eliminate waste is stimulating a green industrial revolution. New materials and growth industries are emerging, together with a growth in jobs. In Germany recycling already employs more people than telecommunications. In the US, it has overtaken the auto industry in direct jobs. Governments that embarked on policies to reduce waste in order to combat pollution and climate change, are now realising that zero waste is a key element in any post industrial economic strategy.

Municipalities and companies overseas are well on their way to zero waste. They have shown that it is possible to recycle and compost 70% or more of their waste streams with existing product design. Residual materials which are hazardous, or are costly to recycle can then be phased out and replaced by new clean materials that can be returned to use efficiently and effectively.

Increasing numbers of cities and states have adopted the goal of Zero Waste, including Canberra, Toronto, the state of California, and most recently the Government of New Zealand. This charter seeks to extend these pioneering practices to all the municipalities and producers in the UK.

Our starting point is to create zero waste areas where we live and work – in our streets, and villages, in our schools and hospitals, in municipalities and our many different workplaces. We invite local communities, elected councils at every level, and our major institutions and corporations to sign up to these goals, to put in place measures to reduce their waste, and to expand recycling and composting with the goal of achieving Zero Waste by 2020.

By ourselves we can only go so far. The current waste regime still favours disposal over recycling. The Government must change this. Many products are difficult or too hazardous to recycle. The Government can change this, too, by making the manufacturers who produce them responsible for the waste that results, and for redesigning products so that they are safe, long lasting and can be easily recycled.

We call on the Governments of the UK, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to end a decade of policy timidity and give a lead to the promotion of Zero Waste by adopting the following 10 point plan to transform Britain's waste economy:

1. Set a target of Zero Waste for all municipal waste in the UK by 2020 (50% recycling by 2010, 75% by 2015).
2. Extend the doorstep collection of dry recyclables to every home in the UK without delay.
3. Supplement home composting with doorstep collection of organic waste, and establish a network of local closed vessel compost plants.
4. Convert civic amenity sites into re-use and recycling centres.
5. End thermal treatment of mixed waste and limit disposal contracts to a maximum of ten years.
6. Extend the Landfill Tax into a disposal tax. Increase its level, and use it to fund the Zero Waste programmes.
7. Extend Producer Responsibility legislation to all products and materials that are hazardous or difficult to recycle.
8. Open up waste planning to greater public participation and end the commercial confidentiality of waste contracts.
9. Establish a Zero Waste Agency to promote resource efficiency and act as a guardian of public health.

Signed: