

Waste or rubbish is what people throw away because they no longer need it or want it. Almost everything we do creates waste and as a society we are currently producing more waste than ever before. In the UK, we produce more than 430m tonnes of waste per year and every year this figure increases.



Disposing of waste is difficult and costly. Most of it ends up in holes in the ground (landfill sites) or is burnt in incinerators. Making things from recycled material often uses less energy and causes less pollution. This is important if we want to keep the earth a beautiful place to live in. If we recycle our rubbish, less rubbish will need to be buried in the ground or incinerated. Landfill sites are already becoming full and there are concerns about the impact on people's health and pollution caused by landfill sites and incinerators. If we make new things by recycling old things, we will save resources. For example, plastic is made from oil. One day we will run out of oil but if we make plastic from old recycled plastic we don't need to use as much oil!

What are the alternatives to throwing away rubbish? Increasingly, the Government is encouraging people to reduce the amount of rubbish they produce in the first place.

To contribute to minimising the waste we produce, government and environmental researchers advise us that, wherever it is practical and beneficial, people should take the following steps:

- Reduce waste – change manufacturing processes so that less materials are used or change consumer habits so that less wasted material is bought.
- Reuse – choose goods and products that can be used again.
- Recycle – make sure that waste is processed and made into another product wherever possible. Composting is also recycling: the nutrients in organic waste are processed and returned to the soil to help more plants to grow.

### **Waste and schools**

Any building or environment where people live or work will produce a certain amount of waste, and schools are no exception. In general, most school waste is made up of food, paper and packaging waste such as sweet wrappers. It may also contain some glass, metals and plastics.

Minimising waste has a number of benefits for schools. Depending on the waste disposal system in your area, schools can save money on disposal costs by reducing the amount of waste they produce and may also be able to make money by selling materials to be recycled.

Paper is a good candidate for reuse. Are both sides of sheets of paper used before being thrown away? Reducing waste may involve reviewing the types of resources schools buy and considering ways of cutting down.

How easy or practical it is for you to recycle waste usually depends on local amenities. Some schools will have a service which picks up their recyclables whereas others may have to take their materials to recycling banks.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has issued guidance which clearly states councils collecting recycling from schools can count the volume of waste diverted from landfill in this way, towards their own waste minimisation targets. This means more councils are willing to support recycling initiatives in schools, because it is helping them hit their own targets. If a council fails to meet the waste minimisation targets set by Government then they will be fined.

### **Teaching Resources**

Inspiring new recycling teaching materials for both primary and secondary schools are available on WRAP's Recycle Now Schools website.

