

Wasting Away: Rubbish and the Environment

In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the volume of waste produced by UK households. The percentage of household waste dumped in already over-flowing landfills nationwide is at a record high since the UK government began keeping records in 1967, leading some environmental experts to declare that we are in the midst of a waste management crisis.

Facts about Waste

- On average, each person in the UK throws away over eight times their body weight (about 500kg) in rubbish every year
- Over 70% of household waste currently ends up in landfill, however the UK will run out of landfill space in less than seven years
- Over 40% of the waste in our bins is retail packaging
- Some materials, such as plastics and Styrofoam, are unable to be recycled and end up in landfill after only one use
- Once in landfill, household waste materials can take up to 10,000 years to degrade
- In the UK more than half a million birds and mammals die each year from ingesting waste that has polluted water streams from leaking landfills
- Toxins produced by decomposing landfill waste can enter groundwater sources, contaminating drinking water supplies and threatening human and biodiversity health
- Decomposing waste releases hazardous greenhouse gases such as methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, causing air pollution and contributing to climate change

Whilst pollution caused by waste has harmful environmental and social consequences, it also largely preventable. The UK government has recently issued a public warning, urging consumers to be extra vigilant about reducing the amount of waste produced. The following guidelines have been provided:

The Waste and Resource Action Program's Top Tips for Reducing Household waste

1. Try to donate old items to charity rather than throwing them out
2. Recycle where possible and avoid purchasing products made from non-recyclable materials
3. Re-use plastic bags and reduce packaging consumption where possible
4. Compost any leftover food items rather than throwing them in the dustbin
5. Reduce unwanted post by removing your name from mailing lists