

Waste Management

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Introduction

The definition of waste is contested, but can be described as portable objects that have been discarded by the owner due to them no longer being useful or required. This can range from full items (e.g. utensils, cars, machines), to unusable components (e.g. food waste), to small scale by-products (e.g. microplastics). Waste is a direct result of the impacts of human consumption. The capitalist-focused, linear economy (i.e. our collective tendency to buy, use, then throwaway) has led to unsustainable production becoming standard practice, and individuals becoming used to a consumerist, 'throwaway society'.

As a consequence, waste production and management is an area of growing concern for academics and public policy. As populations grow and societies consume more, there has been a related growth in physical waste and a recognition of the implications this causes.

A complete removal of all waste is perhaps impossible, but an achievable goal is to minimise all forms of waste. A common way to achieve this is to divert waste from wheelie bins, and ultimately landfill sites, through practices such as recycling. Slogans such as 'reduce, reuse, recycle' have become popularised to aid individuals' mentality and commitment to reducing waste, reminding us that we all have a role to play in this process. The best strategy for waste reduction will involve all parties: government, industry, and the consumer.

Findings

Policy maker's responsibility

Policy makers create and impose rules and regulations across a range of different subject areas. Within waste policy, the key stakeholders in these decisions are the government and councils who work together to determine the waste management strategies for the UK and local constituencies. In essence, they define the ways in which individuals and businesses are required to dispose of their waste.

Policy can help set the context for business and consumer practice. Policy could, in theory at least, force businesses to stop using non-recyclable waste materials in their packaging. Local authorities can also make recycling easier by providing appropriate facilities in public spaces and for households.

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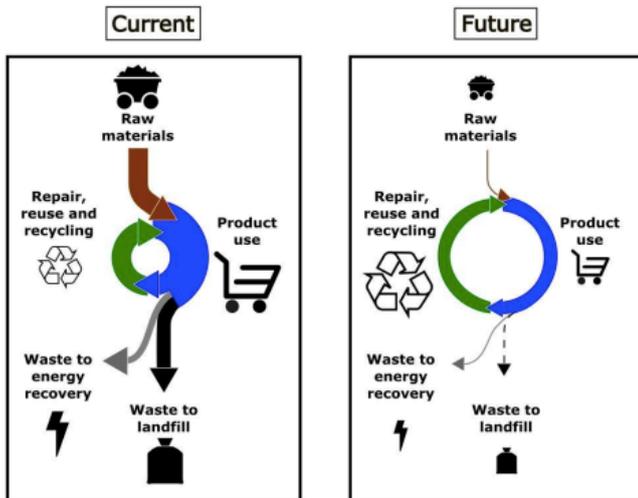
The City of Cardiff has changed its recycling policies and practices to help its population do just this. As Cardiff is within the UK, specifically Wales, the City Council follows national policies surrounding waste management, as well as aligning with additional local regulations. The city has put a specific focus on sustainability within its plans, recognising its growing population, a will for economic growth, as well as a commitment to tackle climate change.

Cardiff has been noted as one of the best cities for recycling in Europe and currently leads Britain in recycling rates, growing from 4% in 2001 to 58% in 2020. In 2019/20, this improved recycling performance led to 35,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions being prevented. This change in behaviour has been achieved by moving household practices from a linear economy, to a more circular economy – where waste is no longer thrown away, but diverted as an 'input' into a new revenue stream. This new practice means that reused or recycled products are used again and again before they ultimately become 'waste'; they may be turned into energy, become raw materials for new things, or simply re-purposed for new activities.

Future outlook

Changing from a linear to a circular economy is therefore key to minimise waste production. Circular economies 'close the loop', as illustrated below. Circular economies emphasise the need to reduce consumption (so fewer raw materials enter the system to begin with), and a higher proportion of these materials are then repaired, reused, or recycled, and in turn become useful products (thus further reducing the need for 'new' raw materials being added to the system). The circular economy also seeks to recover more energy from waste (and thus reduce

reliance on fossil fuels or other energy sources), and means an overall reduction of waste going to landfill.



In order to be successful, policy cannot work in isolation. Although governments have a key role to play in setting the tone for policy, local councils have to implement it, whilst businesses and consumers need to adopt new practices.

Conclusions

- Waste is a large problem and with additional issues, such as climate change and population growth, it will only continue to grow.
- Policy and policy makers have a significant influence on overall waste management and sustainability, thus plans to improve it can create bigger changes.
- Cardiff's waste management practices are successfully transitioning to sustainability, and a part of a move to encourage a circular economy
- Our actions as consumers actions also have key role to play in waste production

References

Cardiff Council. 2021. *The Recycling Strategy for Cardiff*. Available at:

[file:///Users/laurendarbyshire/Downloads/Cabinet%2016%20Dec%202021%20Recycling%20Strategy%20App%20A.docx%20\(1\).pdf](file:///Users/laurendarbyshire/Downloads/Cabinet%2016%20Dec%202021%20Recycling%20Strategy%20App%20A.docx%20(1).pdf) [Accessed: 13/02/2022]

Further Questions

- Should you consider the level of waste produced through your consumption choices and broader lifestyle?
- How do you dispose of your rubbish, at home, in school, or in public places? Are your actions different in different spaces? Why?
- What could government, local councils, schools, or families do to make the transition to a circular economy more successful?