

Stewarding the Earth's Resources

An occasional bulletin for the church about waste

No.16

October 2008

Current issues in waste and resource management

Abstract

Waste issues remain high on the political agenda. Recently the arguments for and against municipal waste incinerators have come to the fore. Friends of the Earth have an in-principle objection to incinerators, but the view of the Local Government Association, the Audit Commission and the Industry Council on Packaging and the Environment is that alternatives to landfill are needed now, and that incinerators must be part of the solution. Idealism in waste issues must be balanced with a healthy dose of pragmatism. The summary of the work of the Waste and Resources Evidence Programme shows that the issue of waste is directly linked by the Government with the fundamental need to make products with fewer natural resources.

Contents

	page
1. Introduction	1
2. A brief summary of the six keynote speakers at <i>Waste 2008</i>	2
3. Audit Commission warns that delays in diverting waste will be costly	4
4. Defra's <u>Waste and Resources Evidence Strategy 2007 – 2100</u>	5
Stewarding the Earth's Resources	6

1. Introduction

Waste issues are of concern to the church because:

- **Issues of waste are issues about people and relationships.** We all rely on other people to maintain our basic services of heat, light, power, clean water, sewage and waste disposal, and there is always an interface between 'supplier' and 'consumer' that involves people. The 'bin man' has traditionally been held in low esteem. But now we are all being brought into a new system that includes waste minimisation; recycling; composting; alternate weekly collections with potential weekly collections of food waste; and potential charges and rewards for sustainable household waste management. And the householder's interaction with the bin man is now at the heart of the whole enterprise. Society is changing, and waste is a touchstone.

- **Household waste brings into sharp focus personal habits, attitudes and understandings** about 'rubbish' and dirt, unwanted things and discarded things, and the wider consequences of living in a materialistic age. We are being forced to address our feelings and beliefs about these things, and for many people this has a spiritual dimension. But tabloid newspapers like to ridicule the notion that there is any underlying meaning or virtue that justifies increased governmental involvement with the way we put out the rubbish. Christians should see that there is meaning and virtue.
- **The waste agenda is ultimately about the way we use finite resources that are part of God's creation.** Waste managers in local councils have a statutory duty to dispose of 'waste', but in the bigger picture, 'waste' is simply an expression of our carelessness with creation. In the striving of groups such as Friends of the Earth, who seek to have all waste managed by minimisation, re-use, recycling and composting, the search for 'zero waste' becomes an absolute goal as compelling, and yet probably as unattainable, as the holy grail. As in all aspects of Christian doctrine, allowance must be made for the consequences of human imperfection, whilst also acknowledging the human search for the divine: idealism in waste issues must be balanced with a healthy dose of pragmatism. Parish clergy may be drawn into local campaigns against new waste facilities in an ill-informed and ill-advised way.

2. A brief summary of the six keynote speakers at the conference *Waste 2008* held on 16th & 17th September 2008

Mike Anderson: Director General, Climate Change Group, Defra.

Mike began by asking if there were any conference delegates who wanted to query the science of climate change: none did so, and so Mike said that he assumed that all present accepted that climate change is taking place and that its cause is human activity.

1. All attempts to arrest climate change depend on China and the USA agreeing to come into international agreement on the matter.
2. The low carbon agenda is now dominant in UK Government. In November this year Defra will publish its Climate Change Impacts Programme. This will pose hard questions. How will we work within a 'carbon budget'? The UK will probably have to buy other nations' carbon emissions in carbon trading.
3. There is now a significant new interest in renewable sources of energy, with new windfarms, new energy from waste incinerators and new tidal schemes likely to be brought forward for development.
4. Waste Strategy for England 2007 – the national waste policy for England - gives a good rationale for action in waste and resource management.

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/

Paul Bettison: Chairman of the Environment Board of the Local Government

Association (LGA) said that local authorities are charged with the statutory duty of disposing of waste, and the pressure is on (through various fiscal regimes) to continue to reduce the amount going to landfill. www.lga.gov.uk

Keith Riley: a Managing Director in Veolia Environmental Group said that, of the three main elements of implementing new practices in waste (economics, technology and attitude), the third of these is the principal one: 'a matter of heart and mind in dealing with people'.

www.veoliaenvironmentalservices.co.uk

Jane Bickerstaffe: Director of the Industry Council on Packaging and the

Environment (INCPEN) said that, in order to ensure sound decision-making, the costs and benefits of all aspects of the life cycle of packaging and the goods that are packaged must be taken into account, both before use by the consumer and afterwards. Thus, when Boots calculated the carbon footprint of its shampoo over the whole life cycle of production, packaging, distribution, retail, use and management of the waste, it realised that the greatest carbon emissions occur when water is heated by the consumer to use the shampoo. Boots publicity now says 'we've done our bit to reduce carbon footprint of this shampoo, now do your bit by using cooler water when you wash your hair'. Jane was critical of a subsequent speaker from Friends of the Earth, for its in-principle opposition to waste incinerators. She said that the carbon emissions from oil use in transportation means that carbon emissions from waste incineration are relatively so small as to be negligible.

www.incpen.org

Erika Coughlan: Vice President, Public Affairs and Communications, Coca Cola

Enterprises said that Coca Cola in the UK has recently put corporate responsibility and sustainability at the heart of decision-making. www.cokecce.co.uk

Michael Warhurst: Senior Campaigner, Resource Use, Friends of the Earth, (FoE)

argued that the top three tiers of the 'waste hierarchy' should be focussed on, in order to achieve sustainable waste management: waste reduction, waste re-use and waste recycling/composting. FoE considers that there is a lot of unrealised potential for recycling the material that would otherwise be landfilled or otherwise disposed of. FoE have an in-principle objection to the incineration of waste and is suspicious of newer 'heat-treatment technologies' that reduce residual waste through processes involving heat but not burning. The objection is mainly on the grounds of: (a) carbon emissions (but see above for Jane Bickerstaffe's response to this); (b) expense, in view of the long contract periods required; (c) the claimed deleterious effects of suppressing waste reduction, waste re-use and waste recycling/composting because guaranteed quantities of residual waste must be delivered to fulfil contracts for incinerators; and (d) inherent inflexibility against potential future changes in technology and waste policy. www.foe.co.uk

3. Audit Commission warns that delays in diverting waste from landfill will lead to costly EU fines on local authorities

On 25th September 2008 the Audit Commission published its report Well disposed: responding to the waste challenge. The report warns that local authorities could face fines totalling millions of pounds unless they deliver planned waste treatment facilities and keep up the pressure to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Quoting directly from the press release, the report:

- **says the UK can meet European Union Landfill Directive targets** to reduce the amount of waste that gets dumped in landfill by 2013
- **congratulates people and councils for their ongoing efforts to recycle and reduce the amount of waste produced in the first place.** Recycling rates have quadrupled since 1999 and have dramatically reduced the amount of waste that ends up in the dump.
- **warns councils that they cannot rely solely on creating less waste and recycling more if the 2013 target is to be achieved.** The report says investment in waste disposal technologies that convert waste into energy or fuel will have the most significant impact on landfill reduction and that delays to the projects currently underway pose the greatest threat to achieving the target. These are major, often controversial, projects that cost a minimum of £20 million and can take ten years or more to deliver. Together they will create additional capacity for 6.4 million tonnes of waste. But if schemes already planned were delayed by just two years, England would exceed its landfill allocation by 13 per cent and incur £140 million in penalties which would be picked up by the taxpayer.

The European Union Landfill Directive requires the UK to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste landfilled to 75 per cent, 50 per cent and 35 per cent of its 1995 level by 2010, 2013 and 2020 respectively. If the UK does not meet these targets, the government and therefore taxpayers face the threat of fines at a national level. If the national target was exceeded by ten per cent, English councils would share penalties of around £100 million.

Source: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/PRESS-RELEASE.asp?CategoryID=PRESS-CENTRE&ProdID=56C611F6-C1F3-4CF7-9A26-B209A1FD13A1>

The active opposition of Friends of the Earth to incinerators is summarised above in Item 1.

The typical response of the packaging and waste management industries is given above in Item 1 by Jane Bickerstaffe.

Stewarding the Earth's Resources no.15 (September 2008) gave the wider picture on waste incinerators and other new technologies that have the potential to replace incinerators.

4. Defra's Waste and Resources Evidence Strategy 2007-2011

The Waste and Resources Evidence Strategy 2007-2011 was published by the Government's Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in September 2007.

The production of this strategy is part of the ongoing work of the Waste and Resources Evidence Programme (WREP).

Quoting directly from the Executive Summary:

As a society, we are consuming natural resources at an unsustainable rate, and large step-changes in our approach to tackling environmental threats such as climate change are needed. Sustainable waste and resource management has a part to play in meeting these aims. The aim of the Waste Strategy for England 2007 is to reduce waste by making products with fewer natural resources, breaking the link between economic growth and waste growth. Products should be re-used, their materials recycled, energy from waste recovered, and landfilling of residual waste should occur only where necessary.

These strategic aims set out by Government have been a major driver for the production of the Waste and Resources Evidence Strategy 2007-2011.

This Evidence Strategy provides the official rationale and objectives statement for the evidence and research programme and will underpin and provide a framework for commissioning policy-relevant and forward looking waste and resources research for the period up to 2011.

The Waste and Resources Research Advisory Group (WRRAG) offers strategic advice to WREP. WRRAG is chaired by Professor David C Wilson.

Its members are:

- the Government's DBERR and DCLG
- Building Research Establishment; Composting Association
- Community Recycling Network
- Devolved Administrations
- Economic & Social Research Council
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
- Environmental Industries Commission; Environment Agency
- Green Alliance
- Hampshire County Council
- INCPEN (see Item 1 above)
- Natural Environment Research Council
- Resource Efficiency Knowledge Transfer Network
- University of Southampton
- Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP).

Source: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/waste/wip/research/index.htm>

Stewarding the Earth's Resources

Stewarding the Earth's Resources is an occasional bulletin for the church which:

- sets out current issues in waste planning
- is compiled by the Revd Jon Hale BA, who is an ordained Church of England clergyman with a background in waste management and planning.
- affirms the work of Waste Planning Authorities, Waste Collection Authorities and Waste Disposal Authorities and the work of the waste management industry.
- is published on www.earthresources.org.uk

In the Autumn of 2007 Jon Hale successfully completed research during a ten-week sabbatical on **Opportunities for the church to promote sustainable waste management in England**. His research report is on www.earthresources.org.uk

Since April 2008 Jon Hale has worked with the Revd Dr Andrew Craig to produce the quarterly publication **Christian Stewardship Sustainable Development**. This is also published on www.earthresources.org.uk The aim is to help the church make connections, so that the church may make a prophetic contribution to the promotion of Sustainable Development.

Previous editions of Stewarding the Earth's Resources:

1.	July 2005	What's happening to waste, and what can Christians conclude from this?
2.	October 2005	Sustainable Development: noble vision or national self-interest?
3.	November 2005	Incineration of municipal solid waste: a contentious issue
4.	January 2006	Rubbish tips dumped in £8bn waste revolution: UK faces 'rude shock' over cost of refuse disposal. (Reproduced from The Guardian 05.01.06)
5.	February 2006	Current issues in waste management from the standpoint of a skip hire / waste recycling company
6.	Easter 2006	Can London kick its waste export habit?
7.	Ascension Day 2006	Restoring the goodness of creation: waste as 'materials' and 'resources'
8.	June 2006	The Town & Country Planning system: delivering essential new waste facilities. (Interview with Hilary Herbert [president of the Planning Officers Society] reproduced from Planning 23.06.06).
9.	July 2006	Behavioural change and the social context of household waste management
10.	November 2006	The 'Waste Development Framework' and 'Sustainability Appraisal': the new basis for local council decisions on planning applications for waste facilities
11.	January 2007	The key role of local councils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the waste targets • Deciding planning applications for waste facilities
12.	Easter 2007	A summary of a small selection of articles and features from 'Waste Planning' journal (no.62: March 2007) that show current issues in waste.
13.	June 2007	Waste Strategy for England 2007: the national waste strategy published in May 2007.
14.	January 2008	The need for new food waste processing capacity and difficulties in obtaining planning permission
15.	September 2008	The broader picture on waste incinerators and other new technologies that have the potential to replace incinerators

Revd Jon Hale, The Vicarage, Vicarage Road, Crawley Down, West Sussex. RH10 4JJ.
Tel: 01342 714922. aj@jkcahale.co.uk www.earthresources.org.uk