

# Whose Job is it Anyway?

Dear Editor,

Though things went quiet for a while, after the initial and rather hysterical press reporting concerning Avian Influenza (bird flu), it is clear that this problem very definitely remains hanging over us all.

Stockpiling of body bags makes for good headlines, but what else should be considered? No doubt huge amounts of work are being done in so many areas, and because much of that isn't anywhere near so newsworthy it will never make it to the front pages. But are we prepared? And what about preparation in the waste industries?

Pandemics affecting millions of individuals may result in a mortality rate that creates difficulties in disposal of the dead. Patient care will generate vast quantities of clinical waste – much of it infective – that must be removed and destroyed without delay. Commercial bird flocks will be culled; where is the capacity to ensure their safe destruction? Perhaps the Government has plans for procurement to ensure we have enough body bags, but is there an adequate supply of other waste sacks and bins? Will the supply chain respond at short notice? Pandemic Avian Influenza will reduce staffing levels to such an extent that disposal services simply will not cope. What happens then – is there a plan?

I sense a real need for urgent review and strategic planning. Of course, priority must be given to protection of the population, in both forward planning and implementation, but the vital support role of the waste management sector cannot be overlooked. In circumstances where that challenge is both sudden and overwhelming there will never be an easy solution. The lessons of Hurricane Katrina teach us that emergency measures must be permitted to set aside established waste management controls in order that a rapid and effective response is not hampered by bureaucracy. But this time we can see it coming. Perhaps the time is right for a working party to bring together Government planners and the waste sector to address specifically the approach to waste management in the event of a bird flu pandemic.

Ian Blenkarn

Dear Editor,

Over recent months and years I have read many articles and letters to the effect that the UK's recycling rates are far behind many other European countries. As a consequence we will fail to meet our statutory requirements for diversion of waste from landfill. Now I read (page 8, *CIWM*, October 2006) of yet another report that will seek to justify demands for higher recycling rates, as in this case should be linked with and/or be driven by waste

charging. It will, apparently, highlight once more how UK recycling rates lag far behind those achieved by municipal authorities in Germany (and possibly elsewhere too). It is unclear if the report will link the need for higher recycling rates to the achievement of (longer-term) landfill diversion targets. However, the *CIWM* comment attached to the article does seem to make this link.

So, can someone please identify where in the Landfill Directive it states that landfill diversion targets are (by law) to be met (in part or exclusively) through recycling of waste?

Can someone clarify whether it is the UK Government's intent to penalise financially those local authorities that fail to meet the UK's ever-rising, self-imposed recycling targets, or will financial penalties only be applied to those authorities that fail to meet landfill diversion targets? If the latter, then why prioritise recycling initiatives when it is only thermal treatment options that will ensure delivery of Landfill Directive targets?

I assume that the report commissioned by the Institute for Public Policy Research will clearly provide statistical data on "household waste only" recycling rates within German municipalities and equally to other EU country data, which may bring the stated 65 percent recycling rate values down to more comparable UK values.

It would be beneficial if it also contained financial data for comparisons between the UK and other European countries for similar waste sources, separately covering collection, treatment and disposal costs. Otherwise the claimed benefits for charging as applicable elsewhere in Europe may be less transferable to the UK. Some waste treatment costs (per unit tonne processed) in some European countries seem well above competitive commercial rates for similar processes as applicable within UK pricing.

I presume the report will also highlight which EU countries will readily meet the EU Landfill Directive targets. I suspect that those with substantive existing/planned thermal treatment capacity, ie energy from waste plants, as part of integrated solutions (that also include sensible, economic levels of recycling) are the ones that will pass the test.

And will the general public in the UK be able to challenge and refuse to pay their contribution for the financial penalties imposed on those UK authorities that fail to meet their landfill diversion targets? A situation that may arise,

**CIWM** welcomes feedback from readers for publication in future issues. Please write to the Editor at [ben.wood@ciwm.co.uk](mailto:ben.wood@ciwm.co.uk) or at **CIWM**, 9 Saxon Court, St Peter's Gardens, Marefair, Northampton NN1 1SX



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