

Kerbside Recycling But at What Cost?

We all appreciate our kerbside recycling service, but not at the cost of injury... or worse

Dear Editor,

Though there exists scope for further expansion, kerbside recycling from domestic premises is undoubtedly here to stay. Most areas use purpose-designed vehicles comprising multiple bulk containers into which glass, cans, paper, food and other recyclable materials are deposited. All good stuff, but what is the cost of kerbside recycling?

I was horrified this week to watch the crew of a kerbside recycling team lean far into the bin of their vehicle that held glass bottles and jars. Balancing at waist level across the edge of that bin, heads deep inside, backsides skyward and legs flying in all directions in an attempt to stay balanced, what were these jokers doing? Astonishingly, they were using hammers to smash the

bottles! Personal Protection Equipment was limited to overalls and gloves. I suppose the rationale was to compact the load, increasing time on the road and reducing frequent returns to base, but this drive for efficiency was just plain crazy.

It gave additional cause for concern to witness a similar occurrence two days later; same local authority, different backsides up in the air, but very definitely the same actions. Lots of potential hazards and obvious management failures would suggest that a punitive Health and Safety Executive prosecution would not be out of place.

Kerbside recycling is a highly desirable, though costly, undertaking. It seems most likely, however, that for these guys the cost of kerbside recycling

might be the loss of their sight!

Ian Blenkharn, healthcare & environmental microbiologist

I couldn't agree more with Ian's sentiments. Already our industry suffers from a far too high fatality and injury rate and, while the industry as a whole must take action to prevent this, the irresponsible actions of a few continue to undermine the hard work of the majority, even if they are doing it in order to provide a more efficient service.

Should we perhaps "name and shame" these crews and their local authorities? It is not the public's job to manage the UK's waste collection workers, but we have to get the message across somehow. - Editor

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the article in the June 2006 issue (a while ago I know) to add my comments on Tesco's new fund for sustainable environmental technology.

I believe that the fact a private company is investing this amount of money (£100m) into such an exciting and environmentally friendly project should be of some embarrassment to the Government. On the other hand, I am not sure exactly how charitable Tesco's intentions are given that green issues are in vogue these days and it is probably both good marketing and prudent business sense, such as the rising fuel costs we have experienced in the last three years.

Regarding the carrier bag situation, Chris Huhne is absolutely correct; even if bags are made degradable they still end up in the waste stream and raw materials are still consumed on a massive scale to supply new bags. Why can our Government not implement a scheme, deemed a complete success in Ireland, where carrier bags cost about 10 pence each regardless of which store they come from? This takes the problem out of the retailers' hands, but apparently they are strongly opposed to this option. Why exactly? Reduce and re-use come before recycling in the 3Rs hierarchy and should be the top aims for any issues claiming to be of benefit to the environment.

Shane Donatello, postgraduate student, Imperial College London

Dear Editor,

I am not a member of your Institution, nor am I a member of the waste industry, or associated with it any way. I am, however, a recycler and someone who, I like to think, is environmentally aware. However, I write to express my astonishment at the wasteful actions of some major companies.

A well-known fast food restaurant provided me with a drive through breakfast this morning with which I was provided a plastic bag containing three napkins, while my breakfast item was wrapped in paper and inside a paper bag. Now, even if it was to remove only the plastic bag from its "service" across its 1000-plus restaurants, the environmental impact would surely be huge... not to mention the immense cost savings this would provide across its "2.5m customers every day". Has no-one ever suggested this action, because to my mind it is not only common sense, it's a win-win situation?

David Charlton, Leeds

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