



**CONSERVATIVE**

# **A CLEANER GREENER BRITAIN**

*A Blue Green Approach  
to Waste & Recycling*

**Conservative Research Department**

For further information telephone 020 7984 8082

The Conservative Party  
32 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HH  
[www.conservative-party.org.uk](http://www.conservative-party.org.uk)

# OUTLINE

## A Blue Green Approach

Labour plan to cover the country with new incinerators to make up for their failure to promote recycling. Conservatives will halt this escalation in the number of incinerators, and instead give new resources to local authorities to promote recycling and green behaviour amongst businesses and residents.

## Common Sense Solutions

Conservatives propose to tackle the problem of waste in three ways: Firstly, we will clamp down on unnecessary, dirty incinerators. Next, we will actively promote recycling – giving every household the opportunity to help the environment. Thirdly, we want to change the whole culture surrounding waste – working to change public attitudes to waste disposal, packaging and dumping.

## Fewer, Cleaner Incinerators

1. We will introduce a moratorium on new incinerators until independent British scientific evidence proves they are safe.
2. Tighter controls must be introduced on emissions from all incinerators.
3. Any incinerators should be used to generate energy from waste.
4. Local residents should receive benefits from being sited near an incinerator.

## An Active Approach to Recycling

5. Every home in the country should have recyclables collected separately from other waste.
6. Local residents should be able to drop larger items of recyclable waste off at collection points / recycling centres; there should be a nationwide scheme to provide subsidised compost bins and water butts.
7. We will introduce a tradable permit system for the disposal of household waste by landfill.
8. We will increase councils' resources for recycling and composting by reforming the landfill tax credit scheme.

## Changing the Culture of Waste

9. We will review regulations to cut down on wasteful packaging and tackle waste at its source; we will simplify regulations to maintain their effectiveness but reduce their burden.
10. We will introduce tougher penalties against illegal dumping of waste.
11. We will produce league tables to highlight councils with good and bad records.
12. The public sector should show businesses how recycled materials can be used without increasing costs.

# BACKGROUND

## Labour's Failure

The Government's waste disposal is a muddle and a disaster for the environment. After three years, Labour are still making little progress on recycling and Britain still lags behind most European countries. Many Labour councils are particularly poor.

Although Labour have shown no hesitation in increasing the landfill tax, the Treasury has seized the revenue rather than it being spent on tax reductions or incentives for more recycling.

## Rising Waste

More waste is being generated under Labour not less. In 1998-9, 28 million tonnes of municipal waste were created, compared with 26.0 million tonnes in 1996-97; on average, this represents an extra 1.5kg of waste per household (bringing it up to 25kg per household).<sup>1</sup>

## Government Targets

The Government have set themselves a target that and 45 per cent of household waste will be 'recovered' by 2010<sup>2</sup>. However, Labour's definition of 'recovery' includes the use of incineration. By 2015, the Government wish to 'recover' two-thirds of all household waste.

## Behind Europe

Despite Labour's claim that they would be the 'greenest government ever', Britain still ranks towards the bottom of the international recycling league table amongst developed nations. Britain currently just recycles 6 per cent of household waste – compared to 24 per cent in the United States, 18 per cent in Germany, 28 per cent in the Netherlands and 42 per cent in Switzerland.<sup>3</sup>

## Failing Councils

Currently, according to independent Audit Commission statistics, 65 per cent of councils have some sort of separate household collections for recyclables.

Conservative councils are better than average – 81 per cent of Conservative-controlled councils have separate collections, compared with 58 per cent of Labour councils and 71 per cent of Liberal Democrat councils.<sup>4</sup>

## European Directives

The EU Landfill Directive<sup>5</sup> has to be passed into UK law by July 2001. The Directive requires the amount of biodegradable household waste (BMW) in landfill to be reduced gradually from the present 85 per cent to no more than 35 per cent by 2020 compared to 1995. This is partly to reduce the amount of methane produced by landfill. Methane is a potent

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<sup>1</sup> DETR press release, 19 April 2000.

<sup>2</sup> DETR press release, 30 June 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Cited *The Guardian*, 10 June 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Audit Commission performance indicators 1998-99, compared with party control May 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Directive 99/31/EC.

greenhouse gas, which causes global warming.

The EU are also in the process of preparing a directive on waste incineration.

**Threat of Incinerators** As a result of the scarcity of new landfill sites, new EU directives and the Government's failure to boost recycling, Labour are intending to divert rubbish from landfill towards incineration. Under Labour's plans, up to 165 large incinerators might have to be built across the country.<sup>6</sup>

**The Health Risk** In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency has recently concluded that dioxins emitted from incinerators cause cancer.<sup>7</sup> Incinerators also release heavy metals, dust particles and acid gases, causing lung diseases, heart disease and damaging the nervous system.

**The Conservative Blue Green Agenda** Labour have failed to deliver on their overstated claims of being the first 'truly green government'. The environmental agenda is now ripe for new thinking and an alternative approach, to protect the environment whilst avoiding excessive regulation and unfair taxation.

We support solutions which will harness the power of the market, develop and encourage British 'green' technology, give greater autonomy to local communities and protect the countryside. This is the Conservative 'Blue Green' Agenda. We will show how one can protect our planet without it costing the earth.

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<sup>6</sup> DETR, *A way with waste*, June 1999, p.25.

<sup>7</sup> Washington Post, 'EPA Links Dioxin to Cancer', 16 May 2000.

# A BLUE GREEN APPROACH

## Fewer, Cleaner Incinerators

### 1. Recycling Before Incineration

*We will introduce a moratorium on new incinerators until independent British scientific evidence proves they are safe.*

Labour have failed to meet the challenge of recycling. As a result, they are planning to cover the countryside with obtrusive municipal incinerators. Local residents have genuine concerns that incinerators could increase local air pollution and generate huge amounts of traffic on country and residential roads.

We believe that incineration should not bear the weight for the Government's failed recycling strategy. We are opposed to such an indiscriminate rollout of new incinerators. We will introduce a moratorium on all new incinerators until independent British scientific evidence proves they are safe.

We will place a radical emphasis on recycling instead. We propose a target that 50 per cent of household waste should be recycled or composted by 2020. Government policies will reflect this target.

### 2. Tigher Pollution Controls

*Tighter controls must be introduced on emissions from incinerators.*

We anticipate that tighter controls will be required on emissions from incinerators. We will alter planning policy guidance<sup>8</sup> to reduce pollution from incinerators. To obtain planning permission, incinerators over a set size will have to demonstrate that they do not emit hazardous pollutants. This may mean that hazardous materials will need to be separated out before incineration. We will look to tighten regulations on emissions from existing incinerators as well.

### 3. Energy from Waste

*Any incinerators should be used to generate energy from waste.*

Conservatives wish to promote renewable forms of energy; incineration can be used to recover heat or electricity from waste. If such waste was to be burnt anyway, no additional carbon dioxide is created; energy from waste entails that fewer fossil fuels need to be used to create energy.

(Subject to the moratorium being removed) we propose that all new incinerators over a set size should use waste to energy technology, unless inappropriate for technical reasons due to the nature of the waste being disposed. We would also encourage partnerships with energy companies. We would consult with industry to see how, over time, existing incinerators could be converted to generate energy from waste.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, PPG22 – planning and pollution control or PPG10 – planning and waste management.

#### 4. Compensatory Benefits near Incinerators

*Local residents should receive benefits from being sited near an incinerator.*

Incineration may have some role to play in waste disposal. However, incinerators should be carefully sited, reflecting concerns of local communities. They should not be placed indiscriminately across the countryside.

We want local residents to receive compensatory benefits for being located near any incinerator. For example, residents could receive a discount on their council tax bill, which would be funded by the local authority (and effectively subsidised by areas without an incinerator).

We will also investigate the possibilities of other benefits – for example, nearby residents near new incinerators could be given discounts on their electricity bills – to reflect the energy generated by the incinerator. We will consult with industry over the feasibility of such proposals.

If local residents must have an incinerator in their neighbourhood, such benefits will help ensure that they get a fairer deal.

### **An Active Approach to Recycling**

#### 1. Doorstep Recycling for Every Household

*Every home in the country should have recyclables collected separately from other waste.*

To meet our recycling target, we will change the way rubbish is collected. According to Audit Commission figures<sup>9</sup>, an estimated 65 per cent of all councils already provide some sort of separate recyclable collection. We wish to see this extended comprehensively across the country.

We want all households to have separate collections of dry recyclable materials (e.g. paper, plastics, and if safe, glass) and wet recyclables where feasible. Only if segregated collections are made will local residents be encouraged to recycle. We will require all local authorities to make segregated collections, just as they are required to collect household waste.

We accept that this may not be possible in a few extremely remote locations, yet this should not be used as an excuse for the rest of the country.

We will provide more funding to local authorities to provide these extra services, so that council tax is not adversely affected.

#### 2. Local Recycling Centres

*Local residents should be able to drop larger items of recyclable waste off at collection points / recycling centres.*

Some items may not be appropriate for doorstep collection. However, it should be made easier and more accessible for local residents to have

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<sup>9</sup> Audit Commission performance indicators, 1998-99.

such items recycled.

We will require local authorities to establish collection points for large items of recyclable waste as well as for electrical items (such as televisions, fridges, computers) and batteries. These should be open seven days a week.

In addition, local authorities should provide municipal composting sites. The compost produced can be sold to generate revenue and used in municipal gardens. Greater sale of compost will also reduce demand for peat, which is a non-renewable resource. Many councils are already able to provide such services.

### 3. Subsidised Compost Bins & Water Butts

*We will launch a nationwide scheme to provide subsidised compost bins and water butts.*

In addition to councils collecting compostable materials (e.g. garden waste) from households, we will support other ways to encourage composting. As part of a nationwide campaign, councils will also be required to provide subsidised home compost bins and water butts in order to help households with gardens compost their own waste at home and conserve water. Many councils are able to provide these popular services already.

### 4. Permit System for Landfill

*We will introduce a tradable permit system for the disposal of household waste by landfill.*

EU directives will entail a sharp decrease in the amount of biodegradable household waste that can be disposed of in landfill (the amount will be reduced to just 35 per cent of 1995 levels by 2020). To meet our recycling target and EU directives, and to ensure that such reductions are met in an economically efficient way, we propose that a tradable permit system be introduced for disposal of household waste by landfill.

Tradable permit schemes allow reductions in landfill to be phased in. Sites or local authorities which are very efficient at reducing landfill are not penalised – as they can sell their spare credits to others who are finding it difficult to meet their targets. Revenue generated by individual local authorities by permit trading would be earmarked for other waste disposal expenditure (e.g. more investment in recycling).

The distribution of permits would initially be based on previous waste production and disposal patterns; notwithstanding, local authorities which already have a good recycling record should not be unnecessarily penalised. A set amount of additional permits could also be sold to generate revenue to plough back into funding recycling.

### 5. More Funding for Councils

*We will increase councils' resources for recycling and composting by reforming the landfill tax credit scheme.*

We appreciate that these new obligations on councils could incur new costs. Central government will help councils to meet these new costs by increasing funding. However, we intend for our proposals to be fiscally

neutral.

To finance this extra central funding, we will reform the landfill tax credit system. We will divert resources from the landfill tax credit system to funding for local authorities to promote recycling and composting.

The funding currently goes to Entrust – a privately-owned regulatory body which has the obligation to distribute the money to non-profit making environmental trusts. It has come under fierce criticism for using the resources inappropriately and for being too close to landfill operators.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, 20 per cent of revenues from the landfill tax can be allocated towards environment projects. In 2000-01, an estimated £400 million will be generated from landfill tax (net of credits), allowing up to £100 million to be allocated towards such projects. The revenue available from the landfill tax credit will soon be higher than £100 million due to Labour's landfill tax escalator.

ECOTEC Research estimate that doorstep recycling schemes typically incur a net cost in the region of £6.32 to £7.78 per household per year. Collections costing £7 per household across 24 million households in the UK might notionally entail a bill to councils of £168 million. However, given 65 per cent of councils already provide some separate collection on recyclables, the actual cost would be much lower. As mentioned, additional funding would be generated by the sale of some landfill waste permits.

In addition, the more that landfill sites become scarce due to EU directives, the more existing resources can be diverted by councils from landfill disposal to recycling. Any liability (e.g. due to inefficiency) will be absorbed by councils rather than by central government.

## **Changing the Culture of Waste**

### **1. Cutting Packaging Waste**

*We will review regulations to cut down on wasteful packaging and tackle waste at its source; we will simplify regulations to maintain their effectiveness but reduce their burden.*

The Packaging Recovery Note (PRN) system was established in 1997.<sup>11</sup> Manufacturing companies (the producers of packaging) are required to buy PRNs for every tonne of packaging waste they recycle. The PRNs are used to show compliance with regulations. The notes are bought from agents who arrange waste recovery and recycling or directly from waste processors.

We will minimise the production of waste by reforming the PRN system

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<sup>10</sup> *The Guardian*, 'Money pours into the road to nowhere', 6 April 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997.



which businesses operate. The system needs to give practical incentives to business to cut back on unnecessary packaging. As general principles:

- Regulations should discourage excessive packaging in products. There need to be clear incentives to minimise waste at the point of origin.
- Packaging regulations should require higher recycled content.
- There should be tougher enforcement by trading standards on existing regulations on over-packaging.
- The regulatory burden should be streamlined, such that processes are tough but straightforward and easy to understand.

## 2. Fighting Fly-tipping

*We will introduce tougher penalties against illegal dumping of waste.*

Higher levels of landfill tax have increased the incentive for developers and builders to fly-tip and avoid paying tax. An estimated 60,000 tonnes of waste is fly-tipped in England and Wales every year.<sup>12</sup> For example, Hertfordshire County Council prosecuted a company called Ironside Haulage for dumping waste on land planned for a golf course; the court fined the firm £1,000, yet the developer is estimated to have earned £1 million from the dumping.<sup>13</sup> The DETR Select Committee has also urged for higher penalties for ‘environmental crimes’ to combat the increase in fly-tipping.<sup>14</sup>

We believe that tougher penalties and higher average fines should be introduced to discourage such behaviour.

## 3. League Tables

*We will produce league tables to highlight councils with good and bad records.*

We wish to encourage councils to promote recycling and sensible waste management, and wish to ensure that councils are accountable for their actions.

To assist this, we will produce a regular league table of councils, detailing the average waste collected per household, how it is disposed of and how much is spent on disposal.

Councils will be required to publish their performance in relation to national targets with council tax bills. Councils, which do well, will receive recognition; councils, which under-perform will be exposed to local residents.

## 4. Government Procurement

*The public sector should show businesses how recycled materials can be used without increasing costs.*

We will set targets for public bodies to minimise waste and use recycled

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<sup>12</sup> Croner, *Waste Management Briefing*, issue 80.

<sup>13</sup> *The Guardian*, ‘£1000 fine is cost of more than £1 million profit’, 6 April 2000.

<sup>14</sup> DETR Select Committee, *Operation of the Landfill Tax*, 14 July 1999.

materials. Given the over-supply of many recyclables, there is often little reason not to use recycled products where appropriate, as the materials are often cheap to buy.

For example, public bodies should ensure a set target of their stationery and publications utilise recycled paper; street furniture can be made from durable recycled plastics. Ultimately, if a sustainable market can be created in recycled materials, more recycling will be encouraged. The public sector has a clear role in leading the way.

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