Valpak
by Reconomy

Achieving zero waste to landfill



Understanding the challenges.

Whilst modern landfill sites are highly controlled and regulated, the resulting emissions and potential for valuable resources to be lost forever make them an unfavourable means of waste management for most UK businesses.

When planning your strategy to achieve zero waste to landfill it is essential you understand your existing waste management activities and the challenges you are likely to face.

The first step is to understand your business processes to try and eliminate waste arising in the first place.

Next it is important to develop a thorough understanding of your existing waste management activities. This will include identifying all your waste streams, the frequency and method of collection, and where your contractors take it for disposal.

Ideally, you should collect and record this information for twelve months to provide a comprehensive overview of your waste management activities and any trends.

This information will allow you to assess which materials can be diverted from landfill and to ascertain that your waste is being disposed of as expected.

It is important to establish a system to track from the baseline so that you can monitor your progress on your journey to achieving zero waste to landfill.



In 2018, 50.8 million tonnes of waste was sent from across the UK to landfill and approximately 31.4%* of that waste came from the commercial and industrial sector.

** https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-waste-data/uk-statistics-on-waste section 9.2*

The waste hierarchy.

The waste hierarchy sets out treatment options for managing waste, ranging from the most to least environmentally preferable; with prevention being the most favoured outcome and disposal the least.

Different waste materials have different values. It will therefore be easier to find alternative solutions (such as reuse) for certain waste streams than for others. Although some waste treatment and disposal options may seem more cost effective financially, they may not offer the best environmental solution.



When you are exploring different treatment options for waste to be diverted from landfill you should apply the waste hierarchy. Where possible, waste should always be prevented or reused before recycling or recovery (incineration) is considered.

Although recovery can play an important role in diverting waste from landfill, relying on this method alone can stifle the environmental performance of your business. Should the government look to introduce an incineration tax in the future then it could also have a financial impact, in much the same way as Landfill Tax has.

Care should also be taken to ensure that anyone handling your waste is legally able to do so. This will ensure that both the environment and your reputation are protected.

Evolution of Waste Management Practices

In the past, most waste was dealt with by disposal, but over time that will shift increasingly to recycling, reuse and ultimately prevention.

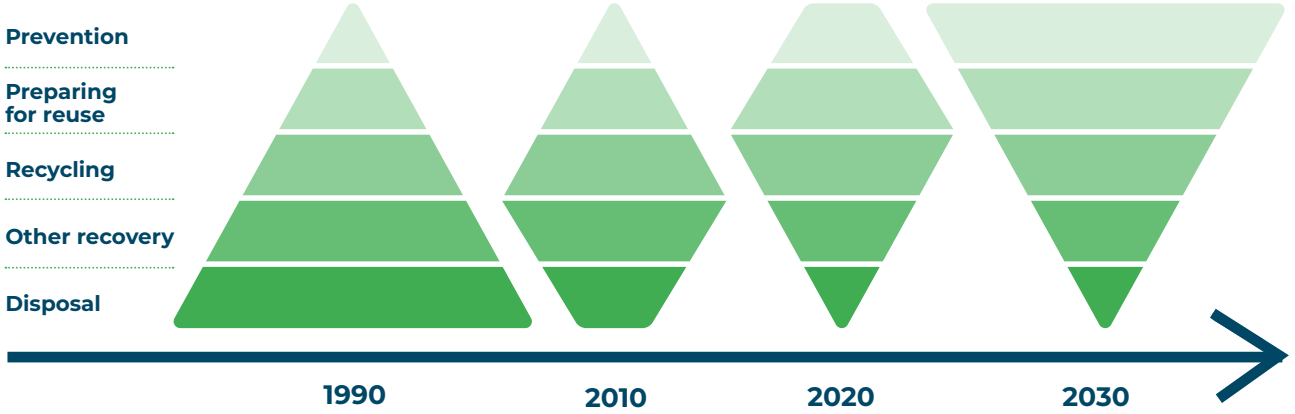


Photo credit: gov.uk

The benefits of working towards zero waste to landfill.

Regardless of the scenarios outlined above, following a zero waste to landfill approach makes business sense for several reasons, some of which are listed below:



Social

The waste industry has gained considerable attention from consumers and the media in recent years, indicating a rising consciousness and concern for sustainable practices and environmental accountability. Being able to prove that you can track your business's waste to meet recycling targets, so that it doesn't pollute the environment, not only meets legal requirements on Duty of Care and the waste hierarchy but can also help demonstrate that the business is trying to reduce its impact.

It is also questionable whether compliance alone will be enough to 'protect' businesses from the consumer action if they see something they don't like. Businesses now must consider going beyond compliance and be seen to be doing everything possible to manage their environmental impact and mitigate the risk of reputational damage. More forward-looking businesses are also actively trying to understand how improved performance can strengthen their brand and act as a point of differentiation.

Environmental

As more pressure is placed on the earth's natural resources their cost and availability will be increasingly impacted. As a result, there is value to be gained from commercial waste, and many businesses are starting to see it as a resource that can be reused, recycled, or has an energy value, rather than a problem that can only be buried. Diverting waste from landfill also leads to further benefits, such as compliance with waste legislation.

Economic

Since Landfill Tax was first introduced in 1996, it has increased each year and is currently at £102.10 per tonne. Therefore, diverting waste from landfill can mean huge cost savings.

With these benefits in mind, many businesses have or are starting to put CSR (corporate social responsibility) policies in place, and some are also starting to link targets with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Moving waste up the waste hierarchy links with the targets set out by the UN in Goal 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Achieving zero waste to landfill.

By following this simple guide, any business can change habits and reduce, or even remove waste disposal from landfill.

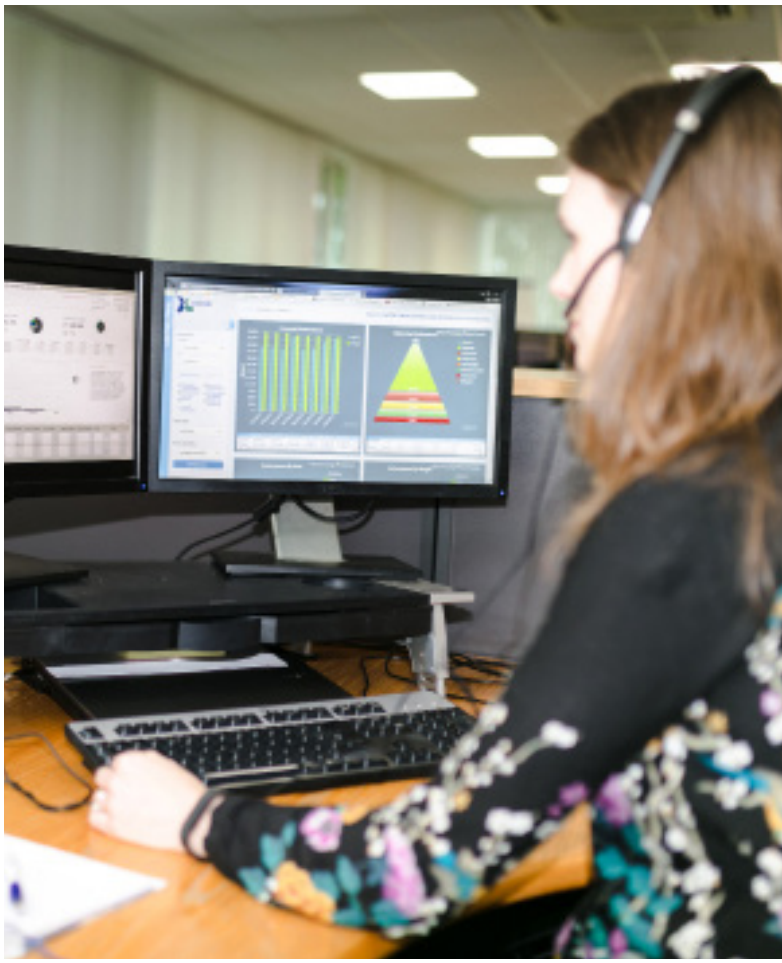
Planning

It is advisable for businesses to spend a lot of time on the planning stage, so that targets are clear and concise. As Benjamin Franklin famously said, “By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail”. Establish whether all your sites should be included. Are you going to focus on operational waste? How does this fit with the rest of the business? Who else needs to be involved both internally and externally? When do you want to achieve your goal and is that timescale realistic? Once you know the answers to these questions you can move onto the next step and make sure your timescales are achievable.

Establishing the baseline

This means carry out a waste audit, as doing so will enable you to establish and identify all waste streams being handled and where they come from. You will then need to map the waste to understand where it goes when it leaves your sites. At this stage you will either want to go back and adjust your plan or continue to the next step.





Implementation

Once planning and audits have taken place you can create an action plan. This should contain KPIs and should assign responsibilities to staff. This plan should be launched across the business so that everyone can get involved.

The roles of effective communication and employee engagement cannot be underestimated in improving performance and now more than ever there is the opportunity to tap into heightened social awareness. Ultimately a business can have the best recycling system in the world but if people don’t understand how to use it or the benefits of doing so then it is likely to fail.

Monitoring and reporting

Some businesses may fall short when it comes to monitoring and reporting, as success will depend on timescales and how good KPIs are. Having a system in place to track and monitor progress is essential as it will help to keep staff engaged, flag up any issues that may arise and will enable you to create reports that can be communicated to senior staff.



Certifying your achievement.

Demonstrate your zero waste to landfill achievement by obtaining industry standard certification from an independent body.

Certification ensures a complete audit trail of how your waste is treated and any process losses. It provides independent verification of your zero waste to landfill achievement, as well as confidence that your business is meeting a recognised standard.

Further benefits of being independently certified include:

1. Demonstrates your organisation's commitment to the environment.
2. Showcases your efforts to improve Corporate Social Responsibility.
3. Increased business opportunities from environmentally aware customers.
4. Marketing opportunities including the use of a zero waste to landfill certification logo.
5. Substantiates green claims and helps to prevent businesses from being accused of greenwashing

Zero avoidable waste to landfill.

This certification tier, introduced in 2023, allows for small amounts of a business's waste to go to landfill when there was no other option for particular waste streams.

It is hoped that this certification tier will communicate transparency and will therefore prevent businesses from being accused of greenwashing.

The certificate for this tier will detail the percentage amount of 'Zero Avoidable Waste to Landfill' and business's that achieve this will be provided with a 'Zero Avoidable Waste to Landfill' logo for marketing purposes.



For more information please contact us.

Valpak
by Reconomy

Unit 4,
Stratford Business Park,
Banbury Road,
Stratford-upon-Avon
CV37 7GW

03450 682 572
info@valpak.co.uk

valpak.co.uk