

Introduction to the waste hierarchy

What is the waste hierarchy?

The waste hierarchy identifies waste disposal options and ranks them in order of increasing environmental impact.

All companies should aim to eliminate waste from the onset, but if this is not practical or possible, then consider reducing, re-using or recycling waste. If none of these steps apply, then dispose of waste in a responsible manner.

How do I move up the waste hierarchy?

Waste disposal has the greatest impact on the environment and typically is the least cost-effective waste management solution for your company. Therefore, by moving up the waste hierarchy you could save money, raw materials, water, energy, improve your image and reduce your impact on the environment. The information on the reverse of this leaflet should help you move up the hierarchy.

Finding where waste is coming from

Under the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991 (and subsequent amendment, 2003)¹ all companies have a duty of care to understand and account for the types and quantities of waste they produce. Waste types are classified as controlled wastes (household, commercial or industrial) or special/hazardous wastes.

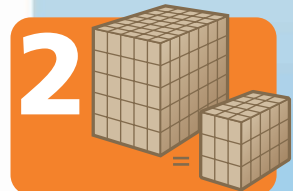
To identify where wastes are generated, walk around your site and produce a waste map. For more information on waste reviews and mapping, see the Envirowise publication ET219 *Waste mapping - your route to more profit*. It is also a good idea to identify a waste champion within your business, whose role it is to identify waste streams, collect data and prepare a strategy for managing and reporting on wastes.

Start here



Eliminate

Avoid producing waste in the first place



Reduce

Minimise the amount of waste you do produce



Re-use

Use items as many times as possible



Recycle

Recycle what you can only after you have re-used it



Dispose

Dispose of what's left in a responsible way

¹ For Northern Ireland this is covered by the Controlled Waste (Duty of Care) Regulations 2002 (and subsequent amendment, 2004).

How to implement the waste hierarchy

1. **Elimination** is the most cost-effective means of waste minimisation with the lowest environmental impact.

- Assess your packaging requirements. Do you require the existing level of packaging? Does product packaging contain excessive protection? If you can see where packaging could be eliminated, discuss it with your suppliers.
- Can single-use packaging be replaced by returnable packaging?
- Can containers be returned to suppliers for re-use?
- Can processes be optimised to eliminate off-cuts?

2. **Reduce** the amount of waste where it cannot be eliminated.

- Assess your packaging requirements. If you can see where packaging could be reduced, discuss it with your suppliers.
- Can processes be optimised to reduce off-cuts, rejects and off-spec products?
- Encourage staff to issue electronic rather than paper copies of reports, newsletters etc.
- Stop junk mail by registering with a Mailing Preference Service.

3. **Re-use** items as many times as possible to maximise their beneficial use.

- Can boxes, pallets or protection filling be re-used on-site?
- Is there a neighbouring business that could re-use these materials?
- **Printer toner cartridges** - choose a supplier that has a returns policy.
- **Paper** - re-use paper from misprints and drafts as scrap paper in the office.
- **Drums** - many raw materials are delivered in drums. If these cannot be returned to the supplier, can they be re-used on-site as waste containers, or used to dispatch goods?
- **Furniture and textiles** - off-cuts, rejects from manufacturing or unwanted items after refurbishment may be of benefit to charities or waste exchange groups.

4. **Recycle** what you can only after you have exhausted steps 1 to 3. Find out if your waste contractor will provide a free collection service or revenue for your waste.

- **Packaging** - such as cardboard boxes, polystyrene filling, and plastic shrink-wrap.
- **Paper** - after it has been re-used as scrap.
- **Metal and glass** - from process waste and food and drinks containers.
- **Textiles** - from process waste and refurbishment.
- **Wood** - from process waste and damaged pallets.
- **Waste cooking oil** - from food processing and the canteen.

5. **Disposal** of waste should only be considered as a last resort, when steps 1 to 4 have been exhausted. Disposal represents the highest cost option and has the highest environmental impact.

Promote waste segregation

Install colour-coded collection bins for different types of materials at various locations around your site, including delivery and dispatch areas, production areas, warehouses, offices and the canteen. Waste segregation ensures that different types of packaging waste are separated into distinct collection bins; it is easy to do and avoids double handling of waste.

Re-use by others

Where materials are of no use to your company, find out if your waste can be re-used by another company under a waste exchange scheme. To find out if there is a scheme in your area, contact the Environment and Energy Helpline on 0800 585794. Also consider donating your waste (cardboard, paper) to schools, theatres, children's groups or not-for-profit scrap stores.

Promote it

Raise staff awareness through the use of posters, suggestion boxes, training schemes, achievement awards and key performance indicators (KPIs). This will encourage uptake and is the key to success.



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Envirowise - Practical Environmental Advice for Business - is a Government programme that offers free, independent and practical advice to UK businesses to reduce waste at source and increase profits. It is managed by Momenta, an operating division of AEA Technology plc, and Technology Transfer and Innovation Ltd.



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