

Sustainability Week at Walsall College



Waste



**Sustainability
Week**



Walsall College

One of the main obstacles in the way of achieving sustainability is waste. Today people in UK throw away more than ever before; enough to fill the Albert Hall every two hours. A large part of the waste we produce that goes to landfill sites could be reused, recycled, composted or used to produce energy. If the future is going to be sustainable we all need to change our attitude to waste, from manufacturers and producers to consumers.

Efforts to reduce waste have been going on for some time; the first bottle banks appeared in the UK in 1977, and now many people are actively recycling waste materials as a matter of routine. Between 1991 and 2007 recycling rates went up from 3% to 35% so there are encouraging signs of progress. Recycling does make a real difference and saves a significant amount of energy and resources.

Despite the signs that we are getting better at minimising waste, there is still room for improvement; UK households throw away 83 million tonnes of food every year, most of which is not peelings or scraps but just uneaten food. This food waste could be used for compost or for producing bioenergy, but the best option would be to avoid generating the waste in the first place.

Did you know?

Each person in the UK throws away an average of half a tonne in waste every year.

Households in the West Midlands recover or recycle 43% of their waste, but in the North West most is sent to landfill and only 13% is recycled or recovered.

It is not known how long glass takes to break down but glass items made over 3000 years ago can still be found today in the Middle East.

The energy saved by recycling two bottles is enough to make five cups of tea.

There are businesses in operation now that specialise in 'landfill mining'; extracting valuable materials that have previously been thrown away. There is more aluminum per tonne in most landfill sites than there is in the bauxite which is mined to produce aluminum.

25 plastic bottles provide enough material to make a fleece jacket.

The cost to taxpayers of clearing up litter and illegally dumped waste from 'fly tipping' is about £100 per minute. This is not a new problem; court records from Stratford-upon-Avon show that in 1515 Shakespeare's father was fined for 'depositing filth in a public street.'

What can you do?

- Turn your thermostat down by one degree – this can reduce your fuel use for heating by 10% and save money on your bill.
- Thick curtains work well to reduce heat loss, especially if they are lined or made of a heavy fabric, fitted close to the window without large air gaps, and closed in all rooms at dusk.
- Open fireplaces also allow a lot of heat to escape from the house, and create draughts – close them off if they are not in regular use with a chimney balloon or a fitted board over the front.
- Always use lids on pots when cooking, as this will reduce the cooking time and prevent energy being wasted.
- Use a low temperature setting (30 degrees) on your washing machine, and whenever possible wash a full load and not a half load. Dry clothes outside whenever it is possible to do so.
- Switch off lights in any parts of the home you are not using at the time, and replace wasteful incandescent bulbs with use energy efficient bulbs
- When boiling a kettle, only put in as much water as you require, and store any surplus hot water or hot drinks in a flask – boiling water takes a lot of energy!

Waste Quiz

- 1) The rate of waste production in the UK would fill the Albert Hall every...
 - a) 2 hours
 - b) 12 hours
 - c) 24 hours
- 2) Recycling two bottles saves enough energy to make how many cups of tea?
 - a) 1 cup
 - b) 3 cups
 - c) 5 cups
- 3) How much of current UK renewable energy production is from waste?
 - a) 3%
 - b) 25%
 - c) 50%
- 4) In 1991 households in England recycled 3% of their waste. What proportion was recycled in 2007?
 - a) 18%
 - b) 35%
 - c) 49%
- 5) How much food do UK households throw away every year?
 - a) 12 million tonnes
 - b) 276 million tonnes
 - c) 83 million tonnes
- 6) When did the first bottle banks appear in Britain?
 - a) 1997
 - b) 1987
 - c) 1977

Competition

Join in our competition to win £40 worth of vouchers. All you have to do is e-mail the four sustainability resource packs available on GOAL and like the Walsall College Sustainability Week Facebook Page to a minimum of three people and cc sustainabilityweek@walsallcollege.ac.uk that you know that are not studying at Walsall College and you will automatically be entered.