

The Waste Hierarchy

In 2008/9 we produced nearly 600,000 tonnes of household waste alone in Surrey, and the Waste Hierarchy (depicted below on the right), shows how we dealt with that waste.

The hierarchy shows that even though we are recycling more than ever (over 40% of our waste was recycled), we are still disposing of a great deal of our waste in landfill. This means we are losing finite resources that could be used again, while damaging our environment. As landfill sites are a major source of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas that is 23 times more damaging to our ozone layer than carbon dioxide. (source : Defra.)



In Surrey we are encouraging everyone to think about their waste and the way we deal with it every day. This will make the hierarchy look like the image on the left, which is the best option for the environment and has many positive benefits for us as well. For example we can save money by buying only what we need.

What does each of the level of the hierarchy mean?

- **Reduce**

This means producing less waste through the choices we make every day. By producing less waste we do not have to consider how we should deal with it.

You can reduce your waste by:

- Buying less or avoiding over-packaged products at the supermarket.
- Wasting less food by using leftovers and using the correct portions for meals. Visit www.lovefoodhatewaste.com for some great recipe suggestions and a portioning calculator.

- **Reuse**

This is when items are used again. This reduces the demand to create new products from raw materials.

You can reuse by:

- Making a junk model
- Using your milkman instead of going to the supermarket. Glass milk bottles can be reused 20 times on average before being recycled².
- Using a plastic water bottle to take drinks to school, work or when you are out and about. This means you do not have to keep buying new bottles, which can also save you money.

Waste Hierarchy Information Sheet

- **Recycle**

Is when the items we place in our recycling bins or boxes are processed into something new. Even though it requires energy to transport and process the materials, it still reduces the need for raw materials to produce new items.



Composting food and garden waste at home or in an industrial processes is another form of recycling, as a new materials is produced from the unwanted green, fruit or vegetable waste.

Please see the Waste Disposal and Composting Information Sheets for further information on the composting process.

- **Recovery**

This uses the waste that cannot be sensibly recycled or composted and incinerates it to generate heat and energy. Gases produced are thoroughly cleaned, with lime added to neutralize any acids. They are then passed through a fine fabric filter to remove any particles that may be present.

- **Disposal**

This is the final option for waste that cannot sensibly be recycled or composted. Waste is buried in holes in the ground where quarrying (for example for chalk and sand) has most likely taken place. When waste is buried it is heavily compacted. This leads to it breaking down in the absence of oxygen (anaerobically) and creating methane. This gas is 23 times more damaging than carbon dioxide³. However, it is possible to capture the gas and use it instead of releasing it into the atmosphere (for example methane can be turned into a biofuel.)



With landfills rapidly filling up, now is the ideal time to think the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse Recycle). Not only are they good for the environment but they can benefit us as well, for example by saving us money

Downloads, for use as handouts, of the current and future images of the Waste Hierarchy are available as downloadable PDFs from the www.surreywaste.info information pages.

Sources:

- 1 www.lovefoodhatewaste.com
- 2 www.defra.gov.uk
- 3 www.wasteonline.org.uk