

Hello!

We're getting in touch because we know that many of you will have seen the BBC's programme *War on Plastic* with Hugh and Anita and we'd like to reassure you about what happens to your recycling in Somerset.

In this Q&A we'll be answering some commonly asked questions, like "where does my recycling end up" and "how can I do more". We'll be explaining that you can have absolute confidence in the way we handle your recycling, because we're leading the way in being open and transparent. We'll explain how the way we recycle is just as important as why we should; and tell you about our exciting plans to keep improving what we do.

Our commitment to openness and transparency – leading the way

Somerset pioneered open, transparent reporting on what happens to your recycling. In 2008 we were the first local authority in the UK to publish detailed guidance as to what happens to the materials we collect. Now, many others have followed our lead. We update this annually and you can find it on our website [HERE](#).

When the national Recycling and Waste Strategy was written in December 2018, we were recognised by the government as a model for best practice in how best to recycle and dispose of rubbish.

How you can help – why we ask you to sort your recycling

The fact that so much of our recycling can be reprocessed in the UK is down to the quality of the recycling itself. In Somerset, we operate a 'kerbside sort' collection service which means that the materials are sorted twice – once by you, as you put them into your recycling boxes, and once by the crew, as they put them in the lorry. This means that our recycling is very high quality, with low contamination, and is in demand by reprocessors both in the UK and overseas.

Some recycling systems elsewhere in the UK don't sort at the kerbside, so everything ends up in one bin and is sent to a Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) elsewhere to be sorted. This sort of system produces lower quality recycling materials than the kerbside sorting system, as it's all mixed

together, so there's a risk of things being contaminated (for example, food waste in with glass bottles), being left behind for landfill, or more being sent overseas.

What about after it's been sorted?

Our contractors are responsible for where your recycling goes after it's been sorted. They do business with well-established, accredited waste specialists both in the UK and overseas. Each month they provide us with details of exactly where the materials are sent and a list of the companies to which they've sold our products. We compile this information annually, and you can view it on our website [HERE](#).

Where does your recycling end up?

Did you know that an average Somerset household produces nearly 500kg of recycling a year? That's equivalent to five baby elephants! Thanks to your efforts in carefully sorting your recycling, last year Somerset offset enough carbon to equal taking more than 25,000 cars off the road for the year.

You might be interested to know that, last year, an impressive 100% of the glass bottles and jars and drinks cans and 97% of the paper you put out for recycling were reprocessed right here in the UK.

Our performance means we're in the top 20% of counties in the UK for recycling and in the top 10% for carbon saving – because we focus on how we recycle as well as how much. We're not stopping there though and have ambitious plans to improve.

From spring 2020, if there's enough reprocessing capacity and demand to keep your recycling in the UK, we won't export it. Last year, more than 91% stayed here in Britain.

Around half of the remaining 9% is exported to Europe and the other half to the rest of the world. All the countries we export to deal with your recycling in an ethical, legal and responsible way and we have full traceability as to where it ends up. We've published this information since 2008 in our

annual record of what happens to your recycling: Beyond the kerb – recycling to resources, which you can see [HERE](#) on our website.

What recycling do we export & why?

The UK does not currently have enough reprocessing capacity for all the recycling we produce, so some is exported. From next year, however, a new reprocessing plant in Avonmouth will mean that we have more ability than ever before to keep all our recycling in the UK.

The new plant, which will be one of the UK's biggest plastic recycling plants, is owned and run by Viridor, who currently manage our rubbish disposal and recycling centres. It will sit next to and be powered by the new Energy Recovery Facility, where rubbish will be incinerated and turned into green energy, instead of ending up in landfill. The new plastics site will reprocess 1.6 billion plastic bottles, pots, tubs, and trays each year – providing UK manufacturers with a viable and sustainable alternative to using new plastic.

If we do need to export because of limited capacity in the UK, it's mostly to countries within Europe, for products such as mixed paper and cardboard, which are reprocessed into new cardboard products such as packaging materials.

Some of our plastic bottles are also exported (again, mainly to Europe) for recycling into new plastic products.

Around half of the clothing and all the shoes we collect are exported to developing countries where they are reused or refurbished. The remainder are reused and recycled in the UK.

What effect does exporting have on the environment?

A study commissioned by WRAP, the leading charity in the field of environmental innovation and resource efficiency, found the energy and carbon savings from recycling outweighed by at least three to one the energy use and carbon emissions from shipping overseas. Even though we export very little, certainly compared to the rest of the UK, exporting our recycling has the added advantage of filling the container ships as they return from delivering goods manufactured in other countries, meaning they're not making an empty journey.

Does everything we put out get recycled?

As we've said, our recycling in Somerset is in demand to be recycled into other things, because it's such good quality with low levels of contamination. For example, plastic and glass bottles are in demand because they can be reprocessed and reused, and the cleaner and better the quality, the easier that is to do. That's why we don't collect low quality plastics, like cling film and plastic bags, because they're difficult to recycle and therefore not in demand, so there's a risk they may not be recycled, and simply thrown away instead.

The waste that has been found dumped overseas has generally been poorly-sorted material, with high levels of contamination, and low-quality plastics, none of which is reusable. You can see exactly where everything from Somerset ends up in our annual record of what happens to your recycling: Beyond the kerb – recycling to resources, which you can see [HERE](#) on our website.

We have you to thank for the high quality of our recycling. We ask you to sort your tins, plastics, cardboard, textiles, paper and glass at home, rather than throwing it all in one bin. While the one bin system might seem easier, it results in low quality recycling that is more likely to be dumped.

How will we continue to improve?

Despite our success, we're not resting on our laurels. We know there's more we can all do. From 2020 we'll start to recycle an even wider range of material at the kerbside, we'll retain our commitment to quality (recycling in the UK as a preferred option) and we'll move away from landfill and towards turning everything that cannot be recycled into green energy, further lowering our carbon footprint.

I have more questions – who can I contact?

We hope this reassures you that here in Somerset we can be confident and proud that the materials we send for recycling are being reprocessed legally, responsibly and ethically within the UK, and that's mainly down to you. So thank you!

If you have any more questions, we'd be happy to help.

Please contact:

enquiries@somersetwaste.gov.uk