Part of the Bin the Burners Briefing Series

How incineration harms recycling

Recycling is harmed by incineration because:

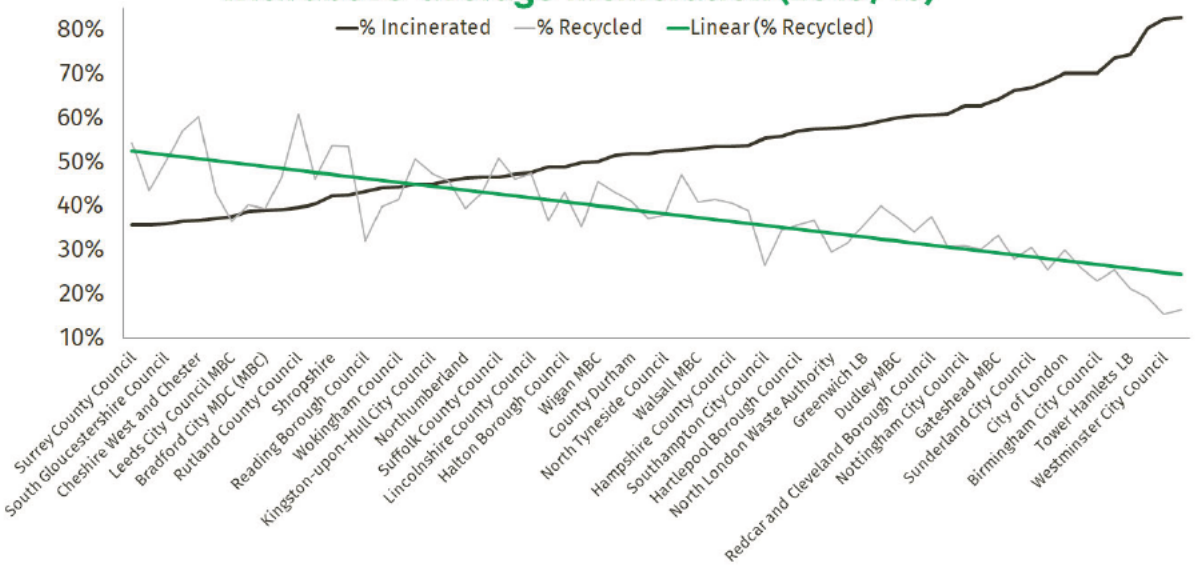
- Much of what ends up as incinerator feedstock is not genuinely residual waste, it is material that could and should have been recycled and composted.
- The prospect of worsening incineration over-capacity discourages investment in recycling by reducing the market for, and confidence in, recycling infrastructure.
- Money and feedstock are locked in to existing and proposed incinerators and this reduces flexibility and means that money is diverted from investment in recycling and that feedstock becomes unavailable for reprocessing.
- For a range of reasons including Government subsidies, environmental externalities, and put-or-pay contracts, the true cost of incineration is not reflected in the price of treatment. This means that the return on investment in recycling and recycling education is undermined.

Taken together, these factors serve to perversely disincentivise councils and businesses from maximising high quality recycling of plastics, food and other waste, and in turn this reduces the market for such services, hampering investment in the research and development of technologies and the construction of domestic recycling and reprocessing facilities.

Success factors contributing to high rates of recycling include:

- The widest array of materials being collected for recycling (e.g. separate food waste collection).
- The flexibility to increase the range of materials collected as they become easier and more profitable to recycle.
- The availability of sorting and treatment facilities that can recycle or compost this material.
- Recycling education so that people put the right things in the right bins.

Municipal waste treatment rates for councils with above-average incineration (2015/16)



> *...lower [recycling] rates could result from an authority focusing on avoiding landfill by investing in incineration and targeting its waste management policies on that treatment solution, rather than poor recycling awareness or initiatives.*
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> **Defra (2012)**