

# the green page

News and information from the Hebden Bridge Alternative Technology Centre

## ATC CONTACTS

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The views expressed by individuals on the Green Page do not necessarily represent the views of the ATC.



Children and staff from Allerton Primary School, Bradford, getting to grips with paper recycling during their recent trip to the Alternative Technology Centre. Their daylong visit also included a tour of the Centre and an innovative plastic recycling workshop. For more details of school visits contact the SuSchool coordinator on (01422) 842121.

## A to Z of recycling

### J's

The reduction in energy consumption and pollution that could be achieved by the United Kingdom recycling 70% of its municipal waste is equivalent to removing 5.4 million cars from our roads! Forwards with the A-Z of recycling...

J is for...

**Jars** - we each use approximately 100 glass jars a year! Before they are ultimately recycled jars are ideal airtight storage containers, invaluable for homemade jams and chutneys, as well as being excellent mini-cloches or propagators in the garden.

**Jeans, jumpers and jackets** - buying second-hand clothes from, and donating to

local charity shops or jumble sales is an everyday example of effective recycling.

**Jewellery** - buy second-hand or jewellery made from recycled materials. Donate any unwanted items to local charity shops.

**Jiffy bags** - These take up loads of room in landfill, are quite expensive to buy, but can be re-used countless times. Why not save and re-use them with new homemade labels!

**Join** in your local recycling scheme! - To find out if you are on Kerbside's weekly collection route contact them on (01422) 881110.

**Jokes** - did you hear the one about the inflatable boy who took a pin to school with him?

**Journalism** - try not to follow Bernhard Ingham's policy of regularly recycling old ideas and articles and sending them to our local newspaper.

**Junk mail** - junk mail produces a shocking waste of resources. 44% of junk mail is thrown away without being opened! Rather than perpetual recycling why not initiate your very own Zero Waste Strategy and reduce this waste at its source? Contact the Mailing Preference Service, Freepost 22, London WE1 7EZ (Telephone - 0207 7664410) and ask for your name to be removed from mailing lists. If junk mail persists you can return it marked "return to sender" with a note asking to be taken off their lists.

## WHAT ON EARTH IS?...Zero Waste Strategy

Following a parliamentary lobby, "Beyond Recycling, Towards Zero Waste", hosted by Liberal Democrat MP Sue Doughty, the UK Zero Waste Charter has been launched by an alliance of environmental groups. It calls on the government to set a target of zero waste for all municipal waste by 2020.

Despite nearly thirty years of often well-intentioned environmental waste policies, huge mountains of rubbish continue to be created and are having an increasingly detrimental effect on all of our lives. Modern-day waste disposal systems that rely on burning and burying large amounts of rubbish commit us to increasing levels of pollution, the loss of valuable recyclable goods, and missed opportunities for job creation.

Unlike traditional waste management policies however Zero Waste Strategy recognises that the continued creation of waste must not be examined as a problem of how to get rid of it, but instead as a way of stopping its creation in the first place! Everyone has a role to play in this strategy but it inevitably shifts the burden of responsibility to producers, designers and

suppliers. It also clearly puts waste reduction, re-use, repair and recycling at the top of the waste agenda. If a Zero Waste Strategy is adopted there is clearly no need for the incineration of waste or new landfill sites.

Products that are wrapped in excessive packaging, goods that cannot be used or consumed in an environmentally sound way and for which there are no safe recycling technologies would be phased out under a Zero Waste Strategy. Producers would be made responsible for the environmental impacts of their product throughout its life cycle and that includes the use of renewable energy sources in its production.

A Zero Waste Strategy should be a goal and policy driver for councils and businesses and an aspiration for all households. Individuals have an important role to play by utilising their purchasing power to avoid over-packaged and environmentally unfriendly goods.

Where Zero Waste Strategies have been implemented the results have been amazing. At the Atlanta Olympic Games 85% of its

waste was recycled, Honda (Canada) reduced its waste output by 98% in ten years, California has a recycling rate above 50% and Halifax (Nova Scotia of course!) has reached 60%.

High levels of recycling and waste prevention are essential parts of successful Zero Waste Strategies but the introduction of new eco-friendly production processes, substitution of non-recyclable materials, material efficiency and extended product life are essential.

The Strategy recognises that the long transitional path to actual Zero Waste will be littered with the debris of traditional residual waste. It proposes to reduce and ultimately neutralise such waste through mechanical and biological treatment plants, which are becoming increasingly widespread in Germany and Austria.

Whilst initially criticised for being an unrealistic aim, the value of adopting Zero Waste Strategies is being increasingly accepted as the only realistic and sustainable approach to waste reduction and management.



## A Sideways Look

John Morrison

### Immortal bags

I've read that we Britons use about eight billion plastic bags every year. That's rubbish: there must be twice that number stuffed into the cupboard under my stairs. And I hardly dare open the cellar door any more. I can hear them rustling.

Yes, these bags are everywhere: a tidal wave of tat, threatening to overwhelm us. Eight billion: that's 135 bags per person per year. They blow down our city streets like tumbleweed. When they catch in tree branches, they look like Tibetan prayer flags. Except they're not prayer flags; they're the flotsam and jetsam of a selfish and secular age.

Plastic bags are a global problem. If they're not the worst environmental problem we have to face, they're certainly one of the most visible. With a nice sense of irony, South Africans dub them the "national flower". Turtles eat bags, mistaking them for

jellyfish. The holy cows of India eat them too, as they forage for food; the beasts either choke to death or starve. Discarded bags block drains in Bangladesh, probably contributing to the floods that have devastated the country in recent years. Bags are a bugbear wherever they occur.

The humble plastic bag is an interesting creation. It's flimsy. You're lucky to get home before it splits asunder and deposits your groceries all over the floor. Yet, for all its flimsiness, it's damn near indestructible. The experts can't agree whether it will last 300 years, 1,000 years, or even longer, before rotting away to mulch. But they can agree on one thing: we're creating major headaches for the waste management industries of the future. What a tawdry legacy we're leaving.

Bangladesh has banned polythene bags; Taiwan and Singapore may follow suit. And

closer to home, the Republic of Ireland has levied a tax on plastic bags, which has reduced the number of bags in circulation by a staggering 90%. Shoppers have to pay 15 (Euro) cents per bag - that's about 9p - with the extra revenue being earmarked for a variety of environmental projects. The tax provides a good incentive for re-using bags, instead of letting them pile up at home. The fact that we hoard these bags is a sure sign of a guilty conscience. We know we shouldn't throw them away, yet we usually forget to pocket a few when we go shopping.

It's time our own government grasped this particular nettle. A 9p charge might be just enough to change our wasteful habit of reaching for new bags whenever we visit the supermarket. The ladies at the checkouts open the bags for me, look me up and down and ask "Would you like any help in packing?" Do they say this to everyone, or is it just old dodderers like me? The packing I can manage (even though hand-eye co-ordination is not what it was, thanks to years of recreational drinking). It's paying that's the problem.

Perhaps we could have an amnesty for all those billions of bags already in circulation. I'd be happy to redeem my own collection for a nominal sum. Even at a penny a bag, I reckon I'm sitting on a small fortune.

### YOUR ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGY CENTRE NEEDS YOU!

We are currently looking for people who can volunteer some time to the Centre at weekends to help in the Green Shop and information centre. We provide training in friendly surroundings for work in an area of considerable interest to the general public. For more information contact Abby on (01422) 842121.

### MOSAIC STEPPING STONE WORKSHOP

A workshop will be held at the Centre on Saturday 7th December (10.00AM - 4.00PM) to produce mosaic stepping stones made from recycled materials, similar to those in the Little Theatre Garden. The workshop will cost £40 per person. For more information contact Susy on (01422) 842121.

### SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Sitting Comfortably is the service that collects well-maintained used furniture and household goods direct from your home and then sells them on to homeless people who are being rehoused, or to people on low incomes. To make arrangements for collections and deliveries telephone (01274) 731909 or (01422) 392482 (Tuesdays only).

## TEN BETTER USES FOR STRAW BALES!

1. Straw bale buildings - Originally constructed over 100 years ago, many of these buildings are still used today. Straw bale construction has become an increasingly popular process, it's relatively simple, the walls of a small dwelling can be built with as little as 150 bales, and there aren't many big bad wolves around nowadays.
2. Mulching - A mulch is any material laid on the surface of soil in order to reduce weeds, conserve moisture, prevent evaporation and add organic matter. Organic straw is an excellent mulch!
3. Slow cookers - Save fuel and money by cooking your own soups, stews, sauces or rice in a simple yet extremely effective homemade slow cooker using straw as the insulation.

4. Hair for scarecrows (or even Guys!).
5. Composting - When kept damp and used in thin layers straw is a useful ingredient on a compost heap. It can also be added dry to help rescue heaps that have become too wet, lacking air and foul smelling!
6. Animal bedding.
7. Modern-day research has rediscovered the value of straw as a raw material in the production of paper.
8. Cobbing - A building process that mixes earth, sand and straw to create thick load bearing walls. Cob building began in Europe about 800 years ago and today there are about 50,000 cob buildings still in use in England.

9. A fuel source - The UK produces approximately 14 million tonnes of straw each year, about half of which is used for animal bedding, high grade cattle fodder, and protecting vegetables from frost damage. Straw is a potentially useful fuel source and is currently used on a small-scale for heating farm buildings and greenhouses. On a larger scale, a straw fired power station in Ely currently produces enough electricity for 80,000 homes!

10. Outdoor child playpens and temporary sheep pens!

For info about building with strawbales see the *Amazon Nails website* at [www.strawbale-futures.org.uk](http://www.strawbale-futures.org.uk)

## BEYOND THE VALLEY

Positive green news stories from outside the Calder Valley.

### A CAPITAL IDEA

The snappily titled "Integrated Public And Stakeholder Consultation to Inform The Energy White Paper" recently released by the Department of Trade And Industry concluded that there is a "strong and repeated support for a whole range of renewable technologies". Respondents were concerned that the government isn't doing enough to promote energy efficiency and viewed controlling pollution and global warming as greater priorities than keeping energy costs low. The publication of the White Paper early next year should coincide with the commissioning of what can just about claim to be London's first wind-farm. Part of the old Ford car plant at Dagenham will become home to three 1.8MW wind turbines generating enough electricity for at least 3,300 homes.

### FARMING BATTERIES

Whilst the ATC continues to recharge and re-use domestic batteries, the UK's record on battery recycling remains pitiful. About 22,000 tonnes of batteries, made from a variety of substances and chemicals but all containing some metallic elements that can be recycled, are sold each year in the United Kingdom. Most of them are buried and incinerated, and the 2% collected after use are exported for recycling! However a new scheme recently launched in Bristol offers a full kerbside collection scheme and bring-sites for battery recycling. In less than two weeks over 20,000 batteries have been collected and recycled within their local area, not only keeping potentially hazardous materials out of landfill sites and incinerators but also reducing the need for unsustainable mining operations.

### NUCLEAR MELTDOWN

The UK's 950 wind turbines currently produce enough electricity to meet the needs of over 326,000 homes and have reduced the amount of Carbon Dioxide emissions attributed to energy generation by nearly one and a half million tonnes. New figures from the British Wind Energy Association show that the rate of wind power development will ensure that it accounts for 8% of the total UK electricity supply by 2010. This should replace the 7% of our supply we will lose from nuclear generation, due to the timetabled closure of BNFL's Magnox plants, at a much lower environmental and monetary cost. Wind power could provide at least 10% of the total UK electricity supply without causing any disruption to the national grid.