

20 amazing waste facts

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DID YOU KNOW? In the UK, we each produce 23.5kg of e-waste a year – that's more than an average seven-year-old boy weighs!

- ▶ As a nation, we throw away 1.5 million tonnes of electrical equipment every year.
- ▶ According to a report from the United Nations University, 41.8 megatons of e-waste was thrown away around the world in 2014, enough to form a line of trucks from New York to Tokyo – and back!
- ▶ The majority of e-waste in 2014 was large and small equipment used in homes and businesses; only 7% was made up of mobile phones, computers, and other small IT products.
- ▶ While the US and China produce the most e-waste overall (32% of the world's total), the top five waste-producing nations per person are Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Denmark and the UK.

Discover more shocking waste statistics in our series of WEEE posters.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Glass is 100% recyclable and can be recycled an infinite number of times without loss of quality, strength or functionality.

- ▶ New glass takes a lot of energy to make, first in transporting the materials to the furnace and then to heat them to a high temperature. An efficient furnace burns 4GJ (gigajoules, a unit of energy measuring heat) to melt every tonne of glass – that's the energy equivalent of burning 250kg of wood.
- ▶ Archaeologists have found evidence of man-made glass which dates back to 4000 BC; this took the form of glazes used for coating stone beads.
- ▶ It was not until 1500 BC that the first hollow glass container was made by covering a sand core with a layer of molten glass.
- ▶ Most glass is made from sand, soda ash and limestone. It is then melted in a furnace at temperatures of around 1,700°C. Chemicals can then be added to make different coloured glass.
- ▶ The UK recycles around 50% of bottles and jars. While this figure has doubled over the last five years it still lags behind other countries. For example, both Switzerland and Finland recycle more than 90% of their glass.



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DID YOU KNOW?

Around 20% to 40% of UK fruit and veg are deemed too ugly to be sold by supermarkets.

- ▶ A journalist called Peter Crosskey once reported that a farmer had to destroy 25 hectares of cauliflowers because they had grown too big for retailers' plastic bags.
- ▶ In 2014, a French supermarket chain called Intermarché ran a campaign to prove that ugly produce was just as tasty as non-ugly fruit and veg.
- ▶ Gleaning Networks coordinate volunteers, farmers and food redistribution charities. Their aim is to salvage the thousands of tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables that are wasted on farms every year across the UK and Europe, and direct this fresh, nutritious food to people in need.

Why not post your own pictures of ugly veg in a blog on the Pod?

DID YOU KNOW?

75% of the aluminium ever made is still in use today.

- ▶ Around 12.5 billion steel cans are used annually in the UK. The thinnest part of a steel can wall measures only 0.07mm thick – that's thinner than a human hair. Aluminium and steel are endlessly recyclable so it is important that they are saved rather than dumped.
- ▶ The UK produces over 9 billion drinks cans every year – 80% are made of aluminium.
- ▶ In a whole year, an individual drinks can could be recycled eight times, saving enough energy to make 160 new cans.

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DID YOU KNOW? It takes just 7 days for a newspaper to be recycled and come back as a newspaper again.

- ▶ As a nation we throw away 12.5 billion tonnes of paper every year!
- ▶ All of the newsprint used in the UK contains around 78% of recycled paper.
- ▶ 11 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent emissions were avoided by recycling paper and cardboard in 2008. This is the same as taking around 3.5 million cars off the road.
- ▶ 67% of the paper and cardboard used in the UK is recovered for recycling.

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DID YOU KNOW? We throw away 7 million tonnes of food and drink from our homes every year in the UK, and more than half of this food and drink could have been eaten.

▶ The top three foods that Britons throw away uneaten include such everyday essentials as bread, potatoes and milk.

▶ 5.8 million potatoes and 5.9 million glasses of milk are wasted daily in the UK. Have you ever thrown any of these items away?

▶ Can you guess what might have happened if you were

caught wasting food during the Second World War? Answer: You could have been sent to prison!

▶ We waste the largest amount of food on Sundays. Why do you think this is?

▶ Wasting food costs the average UK family £700 a year. That's about £60 a month... What a waste!



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DID YOU KNOW? UK households throw away 4.9 million tonnes of packaging every year.



▶ Packaging accounts for 16% of all your household's waste. The UK is the sixth highest user of packaging in Europe (per kg, per person).

▶ Packaging can help food stay fresh for longer. A cucumber wrapped correctly in plastic will stay fresh for 14 days; an unwrapped one will be soft in three. Similarly,

selling grapes in trays and bags has reduced in-store waste of grapes by 20%.

▶ The food industry is creating intelligent packaging to help reduce food waste. For example, nitrogen barrier plastic packaging keeps meat out of contact with oxygen, which increases its shelf life by two weeks.

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DID YOU KNOW? 85% of a car has to be recycled or reused at the end of its life.

- ▶ Up to 2 million vehicles reach the end of their life in the UK each year.
- ▶ New European legislation requires vehicle recyclers to recycle or reuse 95% of a car at the end of its life: 85% must come from recycling or reusing materials, but the remaining 10% can come from recovering energy by burning non-recyclable waste.
- ▶ Local Motors, a company in the US, has created the world's first 3D-printed car – but it's not available to buy yet.

Learn what else can be recycled in our [Recycling infographic](#).



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DID YOU KNOW? The average family throws away 6 trees worth of paper in their household bin each year!

- ▶ UK tissue mills use around half a million tonnes per year of high grade recycled paper – so your recycled paper is put to good use!
- ▶ Corrugated packaging consists of nearly 100% recycled material.
- ▶ For every tonne of paper that is recycled, 17 trees are saved.

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DID YOU KNOW? We throw away 2 million TVs every year in the UK.

- ▶ Most people upgrade their TV every five to seven years.
- ▶ TVs should never be thrown out with household rubbish, as they can contain dangerous substances, like mercury and lead, which could contaminate landfill.
- ▶ Refurbished TVs are often resold to places like Asia and South America.



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DID YOU KNOW?

Less than 5% of mobile phones are recycled.

- ▶ There are an estimated 90 million unused mobile phones in the UK – that’s about two mobile phones for every household.
- ▶ Mobile phones contain some toxic chemicals, but also precious metals, like gold and silver. In fact, there’s enough gold in 50 mobile phones to make one gold wedding ring!
- ▶ It’s easy to recycle your mobile phone – and you might even get paid for it! On average, recyclers will pay £65 for an old mobile phone.

Learn more in our [Lifecycle of a mobile phone infographic](#).



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DID YOU KNOW? It takes 530 lbs of fossil fuels, 48 lbs of chemicals, and 1.5 tons of water to make ONE computer and monitor.

- ▶ Making new computers is energy intensive: 81% of a desktop computer’s energy use goes into making the computer, not actually using it.
- ▶ Most people upgrade their laptop every 3 years. But do you think we need to upgrade so regularly? What could you do instead to improve how your computer works or to increase its life?
- ▶ The average household in the UK spends about £800 on new electrical and electronic goods every year.

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DID YOU KNOW?

More than 30% of our unwanted clothing (worth £140 million) goes to landfill every year!

- ▶ The textiles we throw away to landfill each year weigh more than 800 Boeing 747 jumbo jets!
- ▶ Recycled textiles can be resold to charities or sent to developing countries. They can also be turned

into wiping cloths, paper, insulation or carpet padding.

- ▶ As long as it's clean and dry, any textile item – even if it's torn or stained – can be recycled. You can even recycle a single shoe!



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DID YOU KNOW?

A third of the world's entire food supply could be saved by reducing waste – enough to feed 3 billion people.

- ▶ 40% to 60% of all fish caught in Europe is discarded because it's the wrong size or species. This is because of the quota system.

- ▶ The amount of bread and other cereal products thrown away in UK households is enough to lift 30 million of the world's hungry people out of malnourishment. We throw away 24 million slices of bread every day!

- ▶ In the UK, we throw away 1.6 million bananas and 1.2 million yoghurts daily.

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DID YOU KNOW? In the UK if we all stopped wasting the food which could have been eaten, it would have the same CO₂ impact as taking 1 in 4 cars off the roads.

- ▶ Each year, food that is produced but not eaten is responsible for adding 3.3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases to the planet's atmosphere.
- ▶ 10% of rich countries' greenhouse gas emissions are caused by growing food that is never eaten.
- ▶ An estimated 15 million tonnes of food gets wasted in Britain from the plough to the plate.
- ▶ The irrigation water used globally to grow food that is then wasted



would be enough to supply the domestic needs of 9 billion people. This how many people are expected to be on the planet by 2050 (based on 200 litres used per person, per day).

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DID YOU KNOW? We now use about 20 times more plastic than we did 50 years ago.

- ▶ Despite this increase in the amount of plastic being used, there continues to be a decrease in the amount ending up in landfill. This is thanks to better ways of managing plastic and growing public awareness.
- ▶ If you laid out all the bottles that the UK has recycled in the past 10 years, they would stretch to the moon and back 10 times!
- ▶ 94% of all UK authorities now offer collection facilities for plastic bottles either through household recycling collection or at recycling centres... However, that means 6% of local authorities still don't!

Learn more in our [Lifecycle of a plastic bottle poster on the Pod.](#)

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DID YOU KNOW? Nearly 25% of electrical equipment that's recycled could have been reused.

- ▶ The average UK home contains around £1,200 worth of electrical and electronic equipment, but many householders don't realise the value in their used products.
- ▶ Only 7% of the UK's e-waste is reused as a whole product.
- ▶ Changing how electrical and electronic equipment is designed, made, bought and disposed of could reduce the nation's carbon footprint by up to 15%.



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DID YOU KNOW?

A worm can eat its own body weight in organic waste each day to create compost.

- ▶ When organic waste ends up in landfill, air cannot reach it. So as the waste breaks down, it creates a harmful greenhouse gas called methane, which can damage the Earth's atmosphere. When this same waste is composted above ground at home or at school, however, oxygen helps the waste to decompose aerobically. This means hardly any methane is produced, which is good news for the planet. What's more, after nine to 12 months, you get free fertiliser to use on your garden too!
- ▶ Did you know that you can compost egg shells, shredded paper, used coffee grounds... even hair?



DID YOU KNOW?

A plastic bottle uses only a third of the materials it did 40 years ago!

- ▶ Understanding the properties of different materials means companies can design new products with recycling in mind.
- ▶ Toyota has replaced some of the parts in its cars made from a mixture of plastic and metal to just plastic. Not only does this weigh and cost less, but a single type of material is far easier to recycle than a mixture.
- ▶ Plastic makes up 12% to 15% of modern cars, but this could increase to more than 20% in the future. This has lots of benefits for the planet. For example, a 5% reduction in the weight of cars can produce a 3% saving in fuel.

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DID YOU KNOW?

In the UK it is estimated that households waste around 19% of all the food they buy.

- ▶ The good news is that in the UK we made a 15% reduction in household food waste between 2007 and 2012. That's enough to fill 2,600 Olympic-sized swimming pools!
- ▶ £660 million worth of chicken, turkey and duck products are thrown away each year in the UK.

Find out more with the William Wastenot activity on the Pod.