

Ministers urge councils to plan for safe re-opening of recycling centres

The government has [today published guidance for local authorities](#) on how they can safely re-open their Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

Councils are being encouraged to open sites to avoid the build-up of waste in homes and businesses and reduce the opportunity for fly-tipping – but only where social distancing can be maintained and the public and staff can be kept safe.

Under the terms of the lockdown, householders can travel to a centre if the waste in their home presents a risk of injury or a risk to public health or the local environment.

The guidance sets out how local authorities could manage access and the number of people who are able to be on site at any one time.

If possible, waste should continue to be stored safely and disposed of using regular council collections.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Maintaining crucial waste services while protecting public health remains a top priority during these unprecedented times, and I commend our councils on the superbly efficient job they are doing in keeping waste collection services running.

We are publishing this guidance to help local authorities re-open their recycling centres over the coming days and weeks. This will ensure that more waste can be properly disposed of and we avoid the likelihood of fly-tipping.

The new guidance recognises the importance of councils making independent assessments of which centres can be re-opened based on how much capacity they have and the practicalities of adhering to social distancing requirements at any one site.

Householders should check with their council to see if their local site is open.

Local Government Minister Simon Clarke said:

Councils have been working tirelessly to keep rubbish and recycling collections open during this national emergency, while bin crews are also playing a vital role in keeping the country going.

Many residents have not been able to dispose of all of their excess or bulky waste. That is why we are helping councils to reopen these sites, where safe to do so, in a planned and organised way over the next few weeks.

Cllr David Renard, Environment spokesman for the Local Government Association, said:

Councils are keen to open household waste and recycling centres as soon as practicable. The decision to re-open sites will be taken by individual councils based on risk assessments in their area.

This will be a gradual process over the next few weeks and based on whether they have enough staff, social distancing measures are in place to protect workers and members of the public and waste staff are given personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of infection and provide reassurance.

Councils will introduce measures to keep staff and customers safe, for example by managing visits through pre-booked time slots.

People should only travel to re-opened HWRCs if it is essential – if their waste is posing a risk to their health, the local environment, or a risk of injury. They should always check with their local council that their waste and recycling centre has reopened before driving there.

In April, Defra published [waste collection prioritisation guidance for local authorities](#), with recommendations on how they could prioritise and adapt their collection services and mitigate any impacts being felt by coronavirus. The government says councils' top priority should be the collection of residual 'black bag' waste to avoid the build-up of waste and protect public health.