

your waste – your responsibility



Factsheet on Treating offensive or hygiene waste for landfill

This fact sheet is aimed at producers, and subsequent holders, of offensive or hygiene waste and gives you more information about the rules that mean you cannot send untreated waste to landfill.

What is offensive or hygiene waste?

This describes healthcare and similar municipal waste, apart from clinical and hazardous waste, which may cause offence to people. Examples include nappies, feminine hygiene products, animal bedding, dog faeces and incontinence waste.

Offensive or hygiene waste is produced as either:

- non-hazardous waste separated from other healthcare waste
- waste collected separately from other non-hazardous municipal wastes.

What do I need to do if I am sending waste to landfill?

Non-hazardous waste must be treated before it can be landfilled.

Why do I have to do this?

This requirement to treat waste is part of a package of measures, applied across Europe by the Landfill Directive. The rules are designed to:

- increase waste recycling and recovery
- reduce potentially polluting emissions from landfills.

What does 'treatment' for landfill mean?

Treatment aims to encourage us to recycle more and reduce the impact of waste that continues to be landfilled.

Treatment needs to be three things (the 'three point test'):

- It must be a physical, thermal, chemical or biological process, including sorting (for example, source segregation by the producer).
- It must change the characteristics of the waste.

It must do this to:

- reduce its volume, or
- make it less hazardous (applies to waste with hazardous properties), or
- make it easier to handle (at the landfill site), or
- recover more of it.

As a healthcare waste producer what do I need to do with my healthcare waste?

The Department of Health has developed a segregation system to deal with offensive or hygiene waste.¹

Where this source segregation system has been implemented for healthcare wastes the requirements of the three-point test for landfill will also have been met. Your waste contractor may ask you to confirm that you have implemented this 'source segregation' system so that they can landfill your waste.

¹ <http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/pdf/GEHO0207BLWJ-e-e.pdf>

As a domestic householder what do I need to do with my waste?

You do not need to do anything.

If you currently dispose of your offensive or hygiene waste as part of your normal rubbish that the local authority collects, you do not need to do anything else. Local authorities already have strict targets to divert household waste from landfill.

Alternatively, you may dispose of your offensive or hygiene waste in a separate container:

- 1 If the waste is healthcare waste that a healthcare worker has asked you to separate according to the Department of Health guidelines, you do not need to do anything else. The waste contractor may ask the healthcare organisation to confirm that they have given you the appropriate advice and containers.
- 2 If the waste is domestic waste separated for any reason from the normal 'black bag' rubbish collection and collected by the local authority or a private contractor, then you do not need to do anything else.

What should other producers of offensive or hygiene waste do?

Offensive and/or hygiene waste may include feminine hygiene waste from lavatories in shops, offices and public areas, nappies from nurseries and mother and baby facilities, incontinence waste from care homes and dog faeces from collection bins.

Because this waste is offensive, it should be collected separately from other waste. The separated offensive waste or the domestic (black bag) waste will then have to be treated further before it can be sent to landfill.

For example the black bag waste might be treated by separating out for recycling items such as drinks cans, paper, cardboard, compostable food waste, recyclable

plastics. Alternatively the black bag waste might be processed at a treatment plant such as an incinerator or a composting plant. Where a local authority collects the waste, we regard it as having been so treated, because of other legal requirements upon them.

The offensive waste could also be treated. This could also be at a treatment plant. Offensive waste is also commonly treated in the storage bins with a chemical agent. Where chemical agents are effective in reducing the number of micro-organisms and therefore reducing nuisance (for example odour) on the landfill this will facilitate the handling of the waste and therefore meet the pre-treatment requirements. We are considering research to explore the effectiveness of chemical agents in these waste streams and will review this position when this is complete.

A waste contractor who collects offensive/hygiene waste may ask you to confirm that either:

- the local authority collect your municipal black bag waste, or
- you separate a reasonable amount of your other waste for recycling, or send it to a treatment plant.

Frequently asked questions

Do I need to segregate my offensive/hygiene waste or can I place it in the black bag ?

As a householder you should separate this material where advised to do so by your local authority (e.g. brown bin collection) or a healthcare professional. In other circumstances small quantities of this material can be placed in the black-bag domestic waste stream.

As a healthcare care worker this waste must be separated in accordance with the Department of Health guidelines, with the offensive/hygiene waste in 'tiger' bags.

If you produce offensive/hygiene waste outside of the home (for example a shop or an office) you need to separate this waste according to the Department of Health guidelines.

For more information

- You can get more advice in Treatment of non hazardous wastes for landfill:
<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/pdf/GEHO0207BLWJ-e-e.pdf>
- Talk to your waste contractor or trade association about what opportunities are available.
- You can get free government-supported environmental consultation, advice and publications from Envirowise:
www.envirowise.gov.uk
- You can also get advice on complying with environmental legislation at the Netregs website:
www.netregs.gov.uk