

Mandatory digital waste tracking

Introduction

The government has updated plans for the introduction of mandatory digital waste tracking across the UK. This is part of the commitment outlined in the [Resources and waste strategy for England](#). Digital waste tracking refers to the use of technology, such as software and databases, to record and track the movement of waste materials throughout their lifecycle.

The aim is to make it easy to track waste and resources in real time throughout the economy as well as to deliver a waste tracking service that is simple to use and provides value for all users.

The plans are to provide a comprehensive way to see what is happening to the waste produced in the UK including:

- Helping support more effective regulation of waste.
- Helping businesses comply with their duty of care with regards to waste.
- Helping the UK move towards a more circular economy by enabling it to maximize the value extracted from our resources.
- Reducing the ability for waste criminals to operate and undercut legitimate businesses through their systemic mis-handling of waste, illegal exports, and fly tipping

The intention is for information to be available on where and how waste is created, who is handling it, what is done to it, and where it ends up.

Mandatory digital waste tracking will be introduced from April 2025.

Benefits of change

Mandatory digital waste tracking is cited by government as a means to help businesses and government move towards a circular economy by joining up and digitizing currently fragmented systems to provide a single comprehensive way of tracking the amount and type of waste being produced and where it ends up.

It will also support the effective regulation of waste, transforming the way environmental regulators monitor compliance, prioritize regulatory activities and help prevent waste crime, including fly tipping, deliberate misclassification of waste, illegal waste exports and the operation of illegal waste sites. Digital waste tracking, it is envisaged, will also facilitate a more level playing field for legitimate waste operators.

Working in partnership

Digital waste tracking is a UK-wide initiative. Whilst waste policy is a devolved matter, the UK government and devolved administrations have agreed to work together to introduce a UK-wide waste tracking service to provide a single system across the UK. The environmental regulators in all 4 nations are also partners in this project and actively involved in the development of the service.

In 2022 the UK government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland, jointly published a consultation to seek views on proposals for the service. They have used the feedback to review and refine proposals which will be reflected in secondary legislation and shape the digital design of the waste tracking service.

Delivery timeline

Mandatory digital waste tracking will come into force from April 2025 with the digital waste tracking service being publicly available to users on a voluntary basis in 2024.

Impact on existing systems

The introduction of a central mandatory service for digital waste tracking will allow for the decommissioning of outdated legacy IT systems, such as the electronic duty of care (EDOC) which has already taken place.

The service should improve the coverage, quality and timeliness of the data that is collected and facilitate more efficient and effective waste regulation and intervention by joining up and digitizing currently fragmented, and mostly paper based, systems to provide a single comprehensive way of tracking the amount and type of waste being produced and where it ends up.

The intention is for this to help support more effective regulation of waste, help businesses comply with their duty of care with regards to waste, help the move towards a more circular economy by enabling the maximization of value extracted from resources, and reduce the ability for waste criminals to operate and undercut legitimate businesses through their systemic mis-handling of waste, illegal exports, and fly tipping.

Government strategy and commitment

Digital waste tracking is included in key government commitments such as the Resources and Waste Strategy in England, and will contribute towards the aims of other key strategies such as the:

- [25 Year Environment Plan](#)
- [UK's Industrial Strategy](#)
- [Clean Growth Strategy](#)
- [Welsh Government's Beyond Recycling Strategy](#)
- [Welsh Government's Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 \(2021 to 2025\)](#) –
- [Making Things Last: a circular economy strategy for Scotland](#)
- [One Planet Prosperity: Scottish Environment Protection Agency \(SEPA\) regulatory strategy](#)
- [Draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland](#)
- [Draft Environment Strategy](#)

Supporting legislation

Through the Environment Act 2021, there is primary legislation in place which provides the powers to introduce mandatory digital waste tracking regulations (clauses 34CA and 34CB of the Environment Protection Act 1990). These regulations can place requirements on relevant waste controllers, or a waste authority, to enter certain information related to the tracking of waste into the waste tracking service.

There will be a range of legislative amendments across the United Kingdom, including (but not exhaustively limited to) legislation relating to the waste duty of care, hazardous waste, trans frontier shipments of waste, waste permitting and licensing and in Wales the statutory use of Waste Dataflow by local authorities.

APSE COMMENT

The new system will be introduced on a voluntary basis during 2024, becoming compulsory in April 2025. It is intended to work alongside reforms to permits for waste carriers, brokers and dealers.

Mandatory digital waste tracking can help councils improve their waste management practices, reduce costs, and enhance their environmental stewardship efforts. It can help in areas like:

- **Improved Data Accuracy:** Digital waste tracking allows for more accurate and real-time data on waste generation, collection, transport, and disposal. This can help councils make more informed decisions and allocate resources more effectively.
- **Enhanced Compliance Monitoring:** Councils can use digital tracking systems to monitor compliance with waste management regulations. This can lead to better enforcement of rules and regulations, reducing illegal dumping and improper disposal.

- **Reduced Environmental Impact:** By having better data on waste flows, councils can identify opportunities for waste reduction and recycling. This can lead to a decrease in the environmental impact of waste disposal.
- **Cost Savings:** Digital tracking can help councils optimize waste collection routes, leading to cost savings in fuel and labor. It can also reduce the need for manual paperwork and administrative tasks.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Digital systems provide transparency in waste management processes, which can improve accountability and help identify areas for improvement. This is especially important when dealing with hazardous waste or materials with specific disposal requirements.
- **Streamlined Reporting:** Digital systems make it easier for councils to generate reports for regulatory agencies and stakeholders, saving time and resources in data collection and reporting.
- **Public Awareness:** Mandatory digital waste tracking may raise public awareness about waste management issues, which could lead to increased cooperation and participation in recycling and waste reduction programs.

However, the introduction of Mandatory digital waste tracking, also poses challenges related to implementation, cost, data security, and inclusivity that need to be carefully addressed and the impact of mandatory digital waste tracking on councils can be significant, as it changes the way waste management is monitored and regulated. Here are some ways it can affect councils:

- **Challenges and Costs:** Implementing and maintaining digital waste tracking systems can be expensive, and councils may need to invest in technology, staff training, and ongoing maintenance. Small or underfunded councils may face challenges in adopting these systems. Some waste carriers have voiced fears there would be

costs of up to £100,000 to convert to Defra's proposed mandatory digital waste tracking system, although some also expected such costs to be "minimal".

- **Data Privacy and Security:** Handling large amounts of waste data may raise concerns about data privacy and security. Protecting sensitive waste data from breaches or unauthorized access is crucial.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Councils will need to ensure that their digital waste tracking systems comply with relevant data protection and privacy laws.

While APSE welcomes and supports the announcements and the objectives of the mandatory digital waste tracking, we await further guidance and information on the final implementation of the scheme and support to be provided to councils to overcome the challenges mentioned above.

[APSE Performance Networks](#) benchmarking services will also be exploring the impact of digital waste tracking on local authority benchmarking and data sources, and this will be a topic for discussion at the upcoming Waste and Recycling Workshop to be held in Blackpool on the 7-8 December. Details about Performance Networks seminar [can be found here](#).

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