

Black bag sorting at HWRCs

The purpose of this information sheet is to remind local authorities in Wales of the health and safety and Environmental Permitting requirements applicable on all HWRCs which sort black bags

Introduction

As local authorities restrict the collection of residual waste at the kerbside through capacity/frequency restrictions the prevalence of black bag inspection and sorting at HWRCs (Household Waste Recycling Centres) has greatly increased. The primary purpose of black bag inspection and sorting at HWRCs is to encourage and inform members of the public who are not separating recycle from their residual waste to do so. Additional benefits include a reduction in residual waste disposal costs. The increase in the number of sites that sort black bags has resulted in the need to remind authorities of the relevant requirements.

This information sheet has been produced in collaboration and consultation with Welsh Government, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). Its purpose is to reiterate and clarify to local authorities in Wales the health and safety and environmental permitting requirements relevant when black bags are sorted at HWRCs. This information sheet does not present revised regulatory opinion or guidance, but clarifies and reinforces existing legal requirements and guidance to ensure that local authorities are affording the correct level of health and safety protection to those sorting black bags and that sites are operating in accordance with environmental legislation.

In recognising the importance and potential behaviour change impacts of black bag sorting at HWRCs, both the HSE and NRW have taken positions which allow this activity to occur but in a controlled manner, subject to several requirements. These are detailed below.

Health & safety requirements

HSE statement: Position on Bag Splitting at Household Waste and Recycling Sites (HWRCs)

If an Operator requires bags containing residual mixed municipal waste (i.e. black bag waste) to be hand sorted at Household Waste and Recycling Sites (HWRCs), they must first assess the health and safety risks to employees and others that arise from the activity, and, following the assessment, introduce all necessary control measures identified to protect those involved in the sorting process.

The risks arising from hand sorting black bag waste are the same for whoever is required to undertake that activity, regardless of whether they are employed by the operator or not (e.g. contractors or members of the public). As such the Operator of the HWRC must provide the same standard of personal protective equipment (as well as any other equipment identified as being necessary e.g. litter picking tongs, hand washing facilities and first aid etc.) to whoever is sorting black bag waste.

Key health risks to operatives and others to be considered when sorting include:

- *Injection/dermal contact with blood borne viruses/pathogenic bacteria as a result of damage to the skin from sharps (needles, broken glass)*
- *Contact with hazardous chemicals*
- *Inadvertent ingestion of pathogenic bacteria (from nappies, cat litter etc.) due to poor hygiene measures.*
- *Possible inhalation of endotoxins and bioaerosols from organic waste*

Other risks Operators should consider in the assessment include direct contact with waste during sorting and clearing and the potential for violence and aggression from members of the public.

Effective supervision, monitoring and instruction are also key to managing the risks and should be included in any assessment. This is especially important if members of the public are required to hand sort black bag waste by the Operator.

Some of the necessary control measures are outlined in the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum guidance : 'Health And Hazardous Substances In Waste And Recycling' <https://wishforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/WASTE-27-.pdf> and Hand Sorting of Recyclables ('Totting') <https://wishforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/WASTE-18-.pdf> as well as HSE guidance on donning and doffing of gloves - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/posters/glovesingleuse.pdf>.

Environmental Permitting requirements

NRW Position on Bag Splitting⁽¹⁾ at Household Waste and Recycling Sites (HWRCs)

Local Authorities who choose not to involve members of the public in processing mixed municipal waste ("black bag") may want to seek clarity on the extent to which competent persons (operatives) controlled by a Household Waste Recycling Centre (Civic Amenity Site) permit can undertake the processing of mixed municipal waste ("black bag waste"). The permit conditions apply to the Operator and those the operator has direct control of (i.e. employees and contractors). For clarity the permit does not directly control activities undertaken by the public.

NRW has assessed the specified activity for a Household Waste Recycling Centre and has determined that this type of facility and activity does not extend to the processing (opening bags, separation and sorting) of mixed municipal waste ("black bag waste"). The activities (and associated Recovery and Disposal codes) are intended to allow the Operator to ensure that waste that is sent

for onward disposal/recovery is of a suitable quality through allocation to specific designated bays/skips. Also, that cross contamination can be avoided through supporting the public in allocating waste to correct receptacles and removing it where it is incorrectly placed e.g. separating out cardboard in plastic bay and reallocating it to the correct place. The risk profile of a HWRC permit does not extend to processing mixed municipal waste ("black bag waste"). This is supported by points raised in this information sheet, NRWS's charging profile for facility types and relevant technical qualifications required.

In recognition of the intention of local authorities to undertake processing of mixed municipal waste ("black bag waste") to act as an educational exercise (to change public behaviour and improve recycling), NRW will support, and has approved, a "low scale" proposal for use at HWRC facility types only.

Subject to meeting key criteria NRW will allow a limited activity for the processing mixed municipal waste by the Operator at a HWRC facility. Some of the key criteria for eligibility for the "low scale proposal" include (but is not limited to):

- The current HWRC permit includes the relevant recovery codes for this activity;*
- The scale of processing of mixed municipal waste ("black bag waste") is limited to being equal to or less than 250 tonnes/yr;*
- Limited to manual separation and sorting only;*
- Limited to clean recyclables – not removal of food, hygiene waste etc;*
- A record is kept of the quantity of black bags subject to processing.*

Guidance will be produced for NRW officers and WRAP Cymru to help support HWRC Operators. For advice on the application of the "low scale" proposal or permit variation Local Authorities are advised to contact their NRW site officer.

(1) Opening, separation/segregation and sorting of the contents of a black bag "mixed municipal waste"

Support for authorities

WRAP Cymru will produce a generic risk assessment and operating procedure for adaptation by operators to support black bag sorting and to instruct staff. These documents can be used to inform operators' own risk assessments and operating procedures but it is essential that professional health and safety advice is taken in drawing up specific documents.

Sources of additional information

Additional information can be obtained by contacting WRAP Cymru at blackbagsorting@wrap.org.uk.

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