

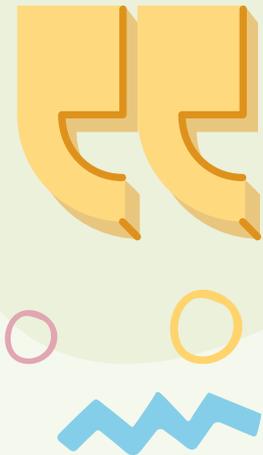


A GUIDE TO IMPROVING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF WASTE PREVENTION

FEBRUARY 2024



FOREWORD



We have made a lot of progress by emphasising the recycling part of the waste hierarchy. But we can't just recycle our way out of the climate emergency; we urgently need to shift mindsets and make reuse and consumption reduction a social norm. "Embracing better, insight-led communications like this new waste hierarchy is an essential piece of the puzzle as it will have a significant bearing on how widely adopted reduce and reuse behaviour become. We urge practitioners across the industry to follow our new guidance and, vitally, to come together to tackle the issue.

Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy

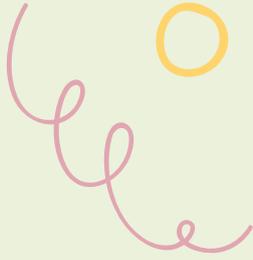
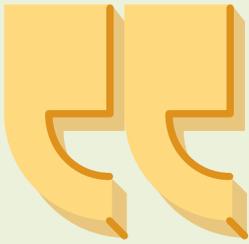
Residents' understanding of the services our sector provides, and the ways they can do their bit to help us move to a world beyond waste, is crucial if we are to embed a circular economy and manage resources sustainably. CIWM were delighted to be part of this research, which takes our understanding forward another step and should help all those who are using the waste hierarchy as a hook for communications on resources and waste issues.

Lee Marshall, Director of Innovation and Technical Services, CIWM

Recycling is now a social norm, however the link between over consumption and climate change is not well understood. If we are to meet climate change targets and move to a more circular economy, it's vital that we're able to clearly communicate the steps we all need to take to reduce the stuff we buy and value our resources. This report provides us with the tools we need to have those conversations with Greater Manchester residents so that we can all take steps to shift our behaviour.

Michelle Whitfield, Head of Communications & Behavioural Change for Greater Manchester Combined Authority





Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority is pleased to be part of this project with Keep Britain Tidy. Using what you've got, buying only what you need, repairing and reusing – these are behaviours we want to see become second nature, rather than a second thought.

Recycling and waste prevention go hand in hand and are both positive behaviours that encourage people to take care of their local environment. People want their community to be cleaner and greener. Promoting waste prevention messages can help to make sure we're giving people the correct information and practical advice to live zero-waste lives.

Lesley Worswick, Chief Executive of Merseyside Recycling & Waste Authority



The role of the waste and resources sector in tackling the climate emergency has been significantly overlooked in recent years, and many people still don't join the dots between the contents of their shopping basket and climate change. This new piece of research is key in shifting the focus beyond recycling, without discouraging it, and in educating the public effectively on choices they can make to avoid and reduce waste. We're committed to working collaboratively with our customers and partners - together we can engage, educate and empower people to make better choices for the planet.

Dr. Adam Read, Chief External Affairs and Sustainability Officer for SUEZ recycling and recovery UK



CONTENTS

Who the guide is for & how to use it	5
The research: why it was needed	7
The research: what we did	9
How to talk about waste prevention: Full results	10
How to talk about waste prevention: Quick guide	17
User-tested waste hierarchy	19
Supporting assets	20
Final thoughts	22
What we're doing next	23

Recognising the challenge we face in facilitating a better understanding of waste prevention among the public, and shifting the focus beyond recycling, Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority, and SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK agreed with us that the most effective way to tackle these issues is to work in partnership.

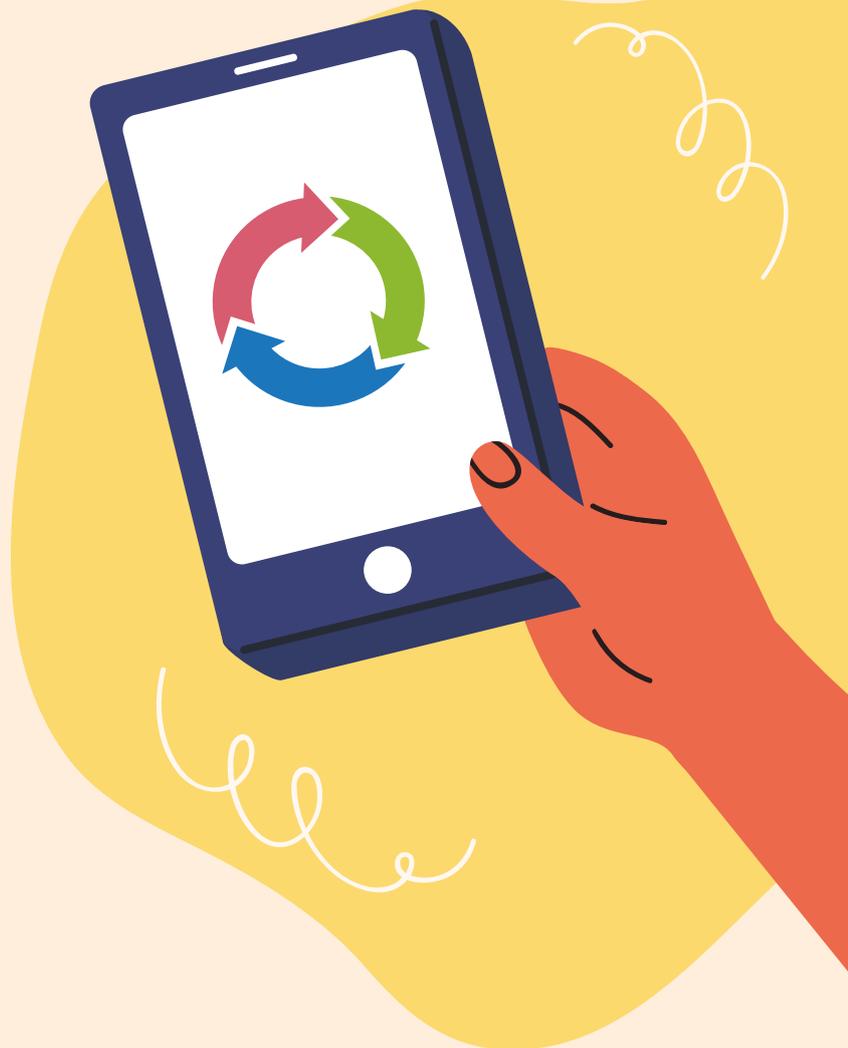
Pooling resources, combining expertise and acting as thought leaders in this space for the benefit of the sector as a whole, it is thanks to the partners and to players of People's Postcode Lottery that this research was made possible.

WHO THE GUIDE IS FOR & HOW TO USE IT

How waste prevention is communicated and framed to the public has a significant bearing on how widely adopted reduce and reuse behaviours are, and will continue to be. At present, we know that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of waste prevention among the public.

Recycling is firmly engrained in people's minds as the best thing they can do to reduce the environmental impact of the things they buy. Current communications are not sending the necessary message that people need to instead prioritise reducing what they buy, and extending the life of the things they have, above recycling.

With the urgent need for us to move towards a more circular economy, designing effective communications is one essential piece of the puzzle – along with improving access to services that support waste reduction and the circular economy, and eliminating barriers to their uptake. In addition to this, we believe it's vital that practitioners across the industry are speaking to their audiences with one, unified voice to help reinforce messages, better aid public understanding and accelerate progress towards the goal of an engrained culture of reduce and reuse in the UK.



This guide is aimed at local authorities and those in the waste sector, as well as behaviour change practitioners, policy-makers and beyond. We welcome anyone with a role to play in communicating to the public on the topics of reducing waste and consumption to make use of the practical, evidence-based tips within this guide.

Using the guide at the point of designing your communications will help you to:

✓
Frame recycling as a less preferable option than reducing and reusing, without discouraging your audiences to recycle

✓
Better understand the context of your communications

✓
Use the correct language and terminology that resonates best with the public

✓
Ultimately see improved action on waste prevention among your audiences

✓
Optimise the effectiveness of your communications, through using a waste hierarchy that has been informed by research insights and is evidenced to aid understanding of waste prevention

✓
Strengthen the link your audiences make between their consumption and the climate emergency

Full results and recommendations are outlined in the main body of this report. Or skip to pages [17–18](#) to read our quick guide and recommended public-facing waste hierarchy, which is freely available for you to use. To support this, we have also produced a video that applies the research

insights and is aimed at helping your audiences better understand waste prevention and the environmental impacts of the things they buy, use and dispose of. This is also freely available for you to use and can be downloaded from [here](#).

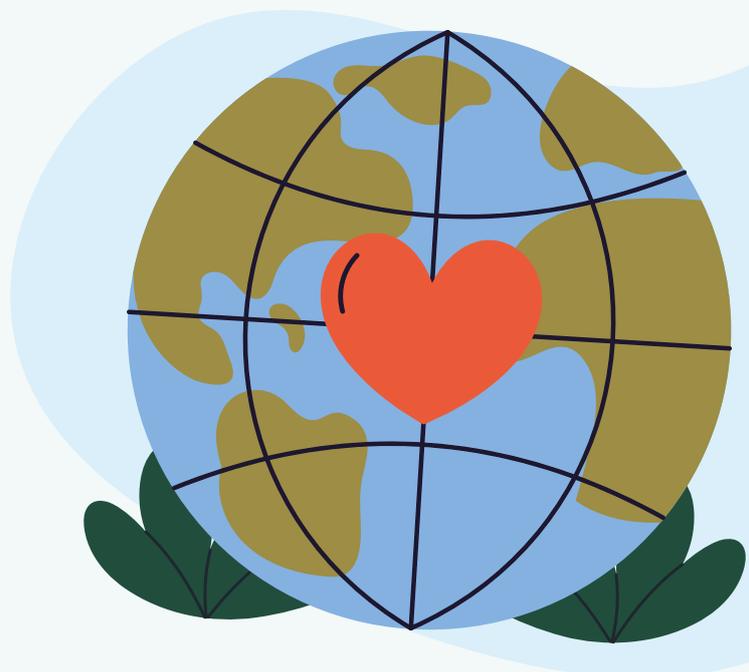
Throughout the report, where we refer to waste prevention or 'reduce and reuse' we are using these terms in their most holistic sense, to include the reduction of consumption overall first **steps**.

THE RESEARCH: WHY IT WAS NEEDED

Consumption at its current level is wholly unsustainable. Along with what we eat, how we travel, how we power and heat our homes, and how we spend our leisure time, the things we buy are directly fuelling overuse of our planet's natural resources and the emission of dangerous levels of CO₂ into the atmosphere. As a result, we are in the middle of a climate and nature emergency.

In the UK, we continue to consume more resources than the Earth can regenerate and produce more waste than we can effectively put to good use. If everyone on Earth lived like people in the UK, we would need 2.6 planets to sustain our demands of nature.¹ Our current economic model is one of taking materials from the Earth, making products from them and throwing them away, and doing so at an unsustainable rate. Instead, we need to live within our fair share of the world's natural resources and move to a circular economy whereby waste is eliminated and products and materials are circulated at their highest value for as long as possible.

[Our 2023 report](#), *Shifting the Public's Focus from Recycling to Waste Prevention: How do we move people up the waste hierarchy?* identified a strong tendency for people to default to recycling rather than waste prevention, and emphasised a lack of understanding of what waste prevention (reduce and reuse) means. This is in direct contrast with the waste hierarchy (more commonly communicated to the public as 'reduce, reuse,



recycle') which tells us that recycling is only the third best option when looking to reduce the environmental impact of what we purchase, use and dispose of.

¹ <https://www.overshootday.org/how-many-earths-or-countries-do-we-need>

The research also showed that waste is seen as something to be ‘managed’ rather than prevented and that people are focused on the environmental impact of throwing things away rather than the environmental impact of having the things in the first place. While opportunities and skills to prevent waste are hindered by barriers that need to be removed, this lack of understanding is another significant, but overlooked, barrier to the take-up of waste prevention behaviours, which also needs to be addressed.

We know from our *Waste Prevention Tracker 2024*² that, while there is progress, current engagement in waste prevention behaviours is not at the levels we need to see. Only 20% of us are getting electrical items repaired whenever possible, only 33% are routinely buying second-hand, and only 7% are regularly using refill services in shops.

In order to bring natural resource use and carbon emissions down to environmentally sustainable levels, we need people to buy less stuff and maximise the life of stuff that already exists: we urgently need the widespread adoption of waste prevention behaviours. To do this, we explored the potential in using the waste hierarchy – a model outlining options for managing waste that are progressively less environmentally favourable – as a public-facing communications tool. Our testing revealed that the waste hierarchy is easily understood and grasped quickly when properly explained and can help to shift the narrative from what we throw away to what we buy.

An internet search returns countless versions of the waste hierarchy, presented differently for different audiences, by different organisations, each labelling and ranking available waste management options differently. As highlighted in our 2023 report³, we suggest that there is value in carefully developing a public-facing version of the waste hierarchy that is user-tested to ensure that it is as widely understandable and motivating as possible, and that can be used consistently across the industry.

This research aimed to fill this gap and enable behaviour change and waste practitioners, as well as other stakeholders, to better communicate waste prevention to the public. We believe that designing better, insight-led communications, which are more likely to bring about increased understanding of waste prevention and behaviour change, is an essential part of facilitating the take-up of waste prevention behaviours and shifting the public up the waste hierarchy.

We have collaborated with four key organisations within the sector to undertake this research. Collectively we must attempt to counteract the marketing messages that people are bombarded with, continually pushing them to buy more stuff. We believe the industry needs to speak with one voice on this topic, to give the public the best chance of understanding and adopting waste prevention behaviours. We therefore need all those with an interest in the circular economy to come together to educate and motivate people to move beyond recycling and make choices that reduce the environmental impact of what they purchase in the first place.

²Waste Prevention Tracker 2024, Keep Britain Tidy

³<https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/recycling-waste-prevention>

THE RESEARCH: WHAT WE DID

The research methodology is comprised of three stages:



A desk-based review of current versions of the waste hierarchy, either sector or public facing, and existing waste prevention communications, to understand how the sector has communicated on this topic to date and identify stimuli for testing with participants through the research.



Focus groups and co-design workshops with 50 residents across three locations in England: an inner-city area of Manchester, a suburb of Liverpool and a rural town in Somerset. Participants represented a range of demographics, included a spread of engagement in wasteful behaviours and were categorised as 'regular recyclers', to establish how we move the public further up the waste hierarchy, beyond recycling. Residents were shown examples of existing waste hierarchies and behaviour change campaigns, and were guided through a series of activities to identify how they want to be communicated with on this topic.



User-testing of new waste prevention communications, including a new version of the waste hierarchy designed to incorporate insights from the research. This stage aimed to test which communications best aided understanding of waste prevention and how, if at all, they should be improved for future use. We did this through a nationally representative omnibus survey, conducted online by YouGov, with a sample of 2,190 UK adults aged 18+. We also conducted 50 on-street qualitative interviews with members of the public in Liverpool city centre, to gain further in-depth feedback on the communications.

Research fieldwork took place in November 2023 and January 2024, with the support of DJS Research Ltd and Feedback Market Research. All insights and tips outlined in this report are learnings taken directly from the research findings, along with some results from our *Waste Prevention Tracker 2024*.



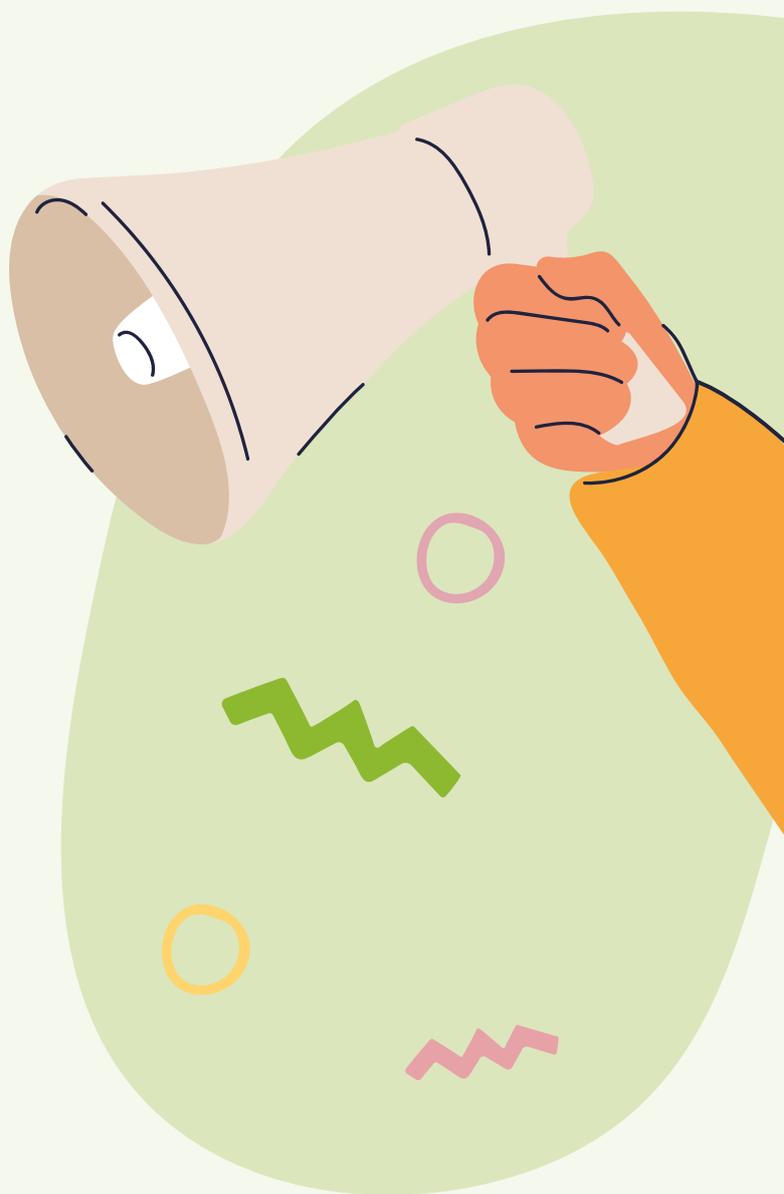
HOW TO TALK ABOUT WASTE PREVENTION: FULL RESULTS

The context of your communications

Understanding the context in which we're putting out waste prevention communications is a key part of their success. We're up against endless marketing campaigns with huge budgets, asking people to constantly consume. Our research participants feel that they are marketed to constantly and recognise that we live in a throw-away society, with things not made to last. Participants were also in agreement that current environmental issues are concerning, and everyone has a personal responsibility to help.

It makes sense then that people want to hear more about how they can reduce waste and consumption to help the environment; 71% of people think there should be more information about how to make changes to the things they buy to reduce their impact on the environment – and less advertising asking them to buy things!

What this also means, however, is that our communications need to be up there with the good marketing campaigns to cut through the noise of everything else the public are asked to do and buy. Participants also told us that to encourage them to make significant changes to the things they buy and use, they need to be hearing repeated messages about this, from multiple directions – over a fifth of people nationally (22%) say that if they're not hearing about this from lots of different places, it can't be that important. With limited budgets to create competitive, high-profile campaigns, this is where working together to put out consistent communications from across the sector and beyond has the potential to be highly effective.



Whilst many welcome messaging on reducing and reusing, there is also a strong perception that the public is not responsible for waste issues. They often see themselves as the end user with little control over what is available to them to buy (e.g. how they're made, packaged and transported), with these factors down to manufacturers and distributors. As a result, there can be feelings that individual efforts aren't enough. Our communications therefore need to acknowledge that people are operating within the confines of what products and services are (and what they perceive to be) available to them, and highlight the contributions that individual, and seemingly small, changes can make to the collective goal. For instance, this could include messages that sympathise with how difficult it can be to make a less wasteful choice, or that celebrate the efforts that some go to, to choose a reducing or reusing option.

Finally, in designing our communications we need to acknowledge the diverse groups we're speaking to, each at a different stage of the waste prevention journey. For instance, these can include:



- **Budgeters:** Due to the ongoing cost of living crisis, there are many people who are already limiting their consumption. Messaging focused on repair and reusing, for instance, may therefore be more supportive to this group.
- **'Perfect' Preventers:** There are others who feel like they are 'doing it all already' when it comes to waste prevention – even if this isn't necessarily the case. This group may benefit from hearing more specifics about practical ways they can prevent waste, and the options available to them, that they may be less aware of. For instance, we know from our Waste Prevention Tracker 2024 that only 30% of people nationally are aware of services where they can rent instead of buy brand new (e.g. tool libraries), and only 27% have heard of local repair cafes.
- **High consumers:** Almost a third of the UK population (32%) say they often buy things they want but don't really need. But interestingly, even this group are likely to welcome waste reduction messengers; 73% of high consumers want less advertising asking them to buy.
- **Second-hand avoiders:** Almost a third also say they don't like buying things second-hand (32%) – a challenge when this behaviour is central to establishing a reuse culture. This group may be more receptive to messages focused on making purchases that are intended to last and extending the life of the things they own.
- **High wasters:** almost seven out of 10 people (69%) say that they try to repair or find another use for every item before considering throwing it away. Whilst a positive, it still leaves a significant proportion of the UK public that does not think about getting the most possible usage out of their belongings. Does this refer to the 69% of people in 1st sentence? If so, suggest edit for clarity:

Also, this doesn't necessarily mean that the 69% of people who try to repair their items are successful in repairing their items, or have the necessary skills or tools to do so.

LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

From reviewing existing waste prevention communications and hierarchies, our research participants identified the terminology that best helps them to understand the specific ways available to them to reduce waste and limit consumption, and the language they would be most likely to listen to and engage with.

It's clear that people want to see everyday language that they themselves would use, in place of waste sector phrases or jargon. For instance, try using 'bin' or 'throw away' in place of 'dispose'. And importantly, this also includes avoiding the word 'waste'! Waste is not a word people typically use, and we know that people associate the term waste more with what they throw away rather than their purchasing behaviour. In our Waste Prevention Tracker 2024, 70% of people associate the term with stuff they throw in the bin (not in the recycling bin) and the same number with throwing stuff out that can still be used. This is compared with 54% of people who associate it with buying more stuff than they really need and 27% who link it to living in a consumer society. If we're trying to communicate waste prevention in its most holistic sense (i.e. that buying less should be considered first), then the word waste can be counterintuitive to this aim. Be specific in communicating that your audiences should be rethinking their decisions around the things they buy and use, not just what they throw away and how.

Umbrella or 'catchall' terms that often feature on levels of waste hierarchies, such as 'prevent' or 'reduce', are also seen as not explicit enough to communicate the various actions that the public should be taking to reduce waste. Even the commonly used words 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' can often blur into one, with many not seeing how they are distinct from each other – three in 10 people (30%) believe that they all mean the same thing. Confusion is higher still among

high consumers (those who say they often buy things they want but don't really need) – a quarter (26%) say they're unsure what 'reduce' really means in this context. This not only prevents full understanding of how to reduce and reuse, but also does not help to communicate the idea that some of these behaviours should be considered before others. When asked to rank the three Rs from most to least beneficial for the environment, only four in 10 (40%) correctly ordered them and a quarter (25%) think that recycling is most beneficial, above reduce and reuse. The terms are therefore not as well understood or widely recognised as you might think. For these reasons, we suggest moving away from the commonly used 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle', and that these terms are used at the risk of continuing the fundamental misunderstanding of waste prevention that we currently see.



WHEN YOU HEAR THOSE THREE WORDS, BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN THROWN AROUND FOR SO LONG AND I DON'T THINK THERE'S ENOUGH INFORMATION A LOT OF THE TIME... EVERYONE'S LIKE 'REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE' BUT I DON'T THINK THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION PROBABLY REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT PROCESS IS.

Research participant

Instead of the commonly used umbrella terms, words and phrases should be specific in describing the action required and making the ask of the public abundantly clear. This will often involve using more words to explain the behaviour in place of a single term. However, it's important to also keep your communications succinct and to the point, avoiding too much text that can be off-putting to readers.

Specific words to use and avoid:

- People use the word **recycling** to describe most things waste prevention – for things that industry professionals would consider as reducing and reusing. So be aware that when we use the word recycling in our communications, many people might think about reusing a jam jar or repairing a dress. If you mean using your recycling bin or service, be explicit in saying this. To prevent perpetuating this misunderstanding, we recommend that the term recycling is also avoided in instances where you really mean reusing.

- People respond better to **positive waste prevention words** with positive connotations – make use of them. E.g. donate, repair, mend, share, borrow, rehome, swap, rethink, pre-loved.
- **Refuse** is often used as a first stage in the waste hierarchy – as in refuse what you don't need or refuse single-use. Without good context, it is often mistaken for its alternative pronunciation and meaning – general waste. We recommend this is avoided to eliminate confusion.
- Similarly, the word **avoid** is viewed as a negative action and its meaning in the context of a waste hierarchy is often unclear.
- **Landfill** is a highly evocative, visual and negatively loaded word that people want to desperately avoid contributing to. Whilst most of our waste does not go to landfill, negative words are useful for behaviours you're trying to discourage.



FRAMING THE MESSAGE

It's not an easy message to tell people that a) their consumption is ultimately contributing to climate change, so b) they should buy less and reuse and repair what they have, and c) doing so has a greater positive impact than the status quo of 'consume and recycle'. So how do we do it?

First, we must make it clear *why* people need to make changes to the things they buy, use and throw away – why it is important and what the end goal is. Research participants told us they want explicit information on what the end result will be and what measurable impact their behaviour can have. Most want to hear about the tangible environmental or financial impacts. Environmental messages should aim to simplify the many direct and indirect benefits of reduced consumption and reduced waste as much as possible. For instance, communicating that buying less 'stuff' leads to:

- fewer resources, like water and minerals, taken from the Earth to make the things we buy – helping to halt deforestation, protect habitats and restore nature.
- less CO2 emitted from making and transporting new products – helping to limit the warming of the atmosphere that's leading to extreme weather.
- less litter and plastic pollution, on land and in our oceans.

Financial messages could focus on the personal savings to be made from buying less and reusing more, or on how individual efforts contribute to collective savings in reducing the amount of waste being processed, or economic benefits in the creation of jobs within the reuse and repair sector.

Our research showed that people also want communications to feel local and be at the community level, so highlighting tangible impacts on the local environment or community is likely to resonate most. For instance, this could involve

using local messengers, such as community groups or schools, local communications channels (e.g. community venues, Facebook groups), imagery that links to the local area and focusing on local benefits of waste reduction. As well as local environmental benefits, this could include highlighting how local reuse services (e.g. reuse shops, tool libraries or repair services) have created local jobs or supported the local community.

When it comes to communicating about impacts on environment, memorable facts and stats will bring the issue to life. However, avoid using technical language (e.g. carbon footprint) without clear and full explanation of what this means – many commonly used environmental terms are not fully understood by all.

People respond badly to being told what they're doing wrong, not doing enough of or how they need to change. Ensure your messages, including ones that make explicit links to climate change, are framed in a positive way, and celebrate and normalise the fact that people are beginning to address their waste and consumption already. For instance, highlight stories or case studies of relatable people or groups who are changing their lifestyles and purchasing habits to limit their impact on the environment. Communications could use real people and stories from your community to convey the message, talking about what they have changed and how.

Acknowledging that your audiences will be somewhere along the waste prevention journey already, perhaps making some efforts to reduce in their own ways, will also help to frame the message positively and create social norms around waste prevention behaviours. For instance, our Waste Prevention Tracker 2024 showed that in the past year, over four in 10 people nationally (43%) have repaired an item of clothing or taken it to be repaired, 57% have bought an item second-hand, and 8% have hired

equipment or tools from a rental service instead of buying them. Even where only small proportions of your audiences appear to be making waste preventing decisions, the fact that they are doing so should be a strong and positive focus of your communications. Importantly, these steps will help to address feelings among some that their individual efforts will have little impact, and make them feel part of a wider movement that has broad, positive implications.

“ YOU COULD DO IT BUT THEN WHAT ABOUT THE 25,000 OTHER PEOPLE, ARE THEY GOING TO DO IT? IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE PERSON TO PUSH A MOVEMENT.

Research participant

In the same way, to ask residents to move beyond just recycling, without discouraging them from doing it, acknowledge the efforts that they have been putting into recycling to date – for instance, using language that gives a sense of progress, such as “it’s a good start” and “now let’s build on it”, and reminding them that “you are making a difference”.

“ YOU NEED TO SAY A POSITIVE BEFORE ADDING SOMETHING ELSE YOU NEED TO DO, OTHERWISE IT TURNS PEOPLE OFF... LIKE SAYING THAT THE RECYCLING THAT YOU’RE DOING IS GREAT BUT WE NEED TO DO MORE LIKE BUYING LESS.

Research participant

Linked to this is the importance of the messenger. Almost half (47%) of the UK public would listen to information relating to waste prevention from their immediate social networks, their friends and family. Think about how you can harness the power of these networks. For instance, do your communications have an element of ‘talkability’, with the potential to travel by word of mouth or via social media.

“ IT DEPENDS WHO ASKED YOU. IF MY DAUGHTER CAME HOME SUGGESTING IT, I’D BE QUITE INVOLVED AND BE LIKE, ‘OH YEAH, REALLY GOOD IDEA.’ BUT IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO TELL YOU, I’D BE LIKE ‘WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?’

Research participant

When participants were asked about other potential messengers, feelings were mixed. 41% would listen to charities, 38% said their local council, and a third (32%) would listen to government on this issue. This reinforces the need for multiple messengers to deliver the same message. One size does not fit all and there appears to be no single messenger who, alone, has the necessary power of persuasion (except perhaps Sir David Attenborough!). Whoever is delivering this message, it's vital that they are perceived as trustworthy, transparent and with good, genuine intentions to make a difference.

AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC-FACING WASTE HIERARCHY³

Along with the insights heard so far, the research also identified what an effective public-facing version of the waste hierarchy should look like. To be impactful and resonate with the public, it should:

- have more options and greater detail than reduce, reuse, recycle, and dispose
- use options that are grouped in a way that feels logical and relevant to the public and the things they buy
- be highly visual, including images and symbols that give examples of the types of items and behaviours they should consider
- not be referred to as the waste hierarchy! This isn't everyday language and skews thinking towards disposal rather than consumption.

We designed and tested a new version of the waste hierarchy that applies the research insights, and tweaked it based on participant feedback.

After seeing it:

- 58% now realise there are much better ways to reduce the environmental impact of the things they buy than using their recycling bin
- 73% think they could do what it's asking them to do
- 65% say it grabs their attention
- 69% say it feels positive
- 51% say it motivates them to protect the planet
- 36% say they are going to make changes to what they buy, use and throw away.

Results indicate that a public-facing version of the waste hierarchy is an effective tool in our toolbox to better communicate waste prevention, if implemented correctly. However, displaying this information within a hierarchy is not the only way to communicate effectively about waste prevention. Alongside it, we tested poster-style digital assets that also applied learnings from the research and communicated waste prevention in its most holistic sense. They also received very positive feedback and we recommend using them to supplement and support use of the waste hierarchy across your communications channels. These assets can be utilised together or in isolation to reinforce any single element of waste prevention behaviour.

We have therefore made these tools freely available for you to use pages [20–21](#), to help better communicate and ultimately encourage a shift towards waste preventing behaviours, and have summarised our tips in the quick guide on pages [17–18](#).

³ For the purpose of this report, we will continue to refer to this tool as the new waste hierarchy, but recommend that in public-facing communications this term is not used and that it does not necessarily need a 'name'. Instead, the context in which the hierarchy is used (e.g. social media posts that sit alongside it) should be sufficient in explaining that this is a tool to help explain the actions they should consider taking, beyond recycling, to reduce the impacts of the things they buy, use and throw away.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT WASTE PREVENTION: QUICK GUIDE

How to talk about waste prevention: Quick guide



THE CONTEXT OF YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

- People want to hear more about how they can reduce waste and consumption – and want less advertising asking them to buy things!
- Acknowledge that people are operating within the confines of what products and services are (and what they perceive to be) available to them.
- Highlight the contributions that individual, and seemingly small, changes can make to the collective goal.
- Acknowledge the diverse groups you're speaking to and the different stages of the waste prevention journey they will be on.



LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

- People want to see everyday language that they themselves would use, in place of waste sector phrases or jargon.
- Shift your language to have a stronger focus on how your audiences should be rethinking their decisions around the things they buy and use, not just what they throw away and how.
- Avoid umbrella or ‘catchall’ terms such as ‘prevent’ or ‘reduce’. This includes moving away from the commonly used ‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’. Instead, be specific in describing the action required and making the ask of the public abundantly clear.
- Keep your communications succinct and to the point, avoiding too much text that can be off-putting to readers.
- People use the word recycling to describe most things waste prevention – for things that we would consider as reducing and reusing. If you mean ‘using your recycling bin or service’, be explicit in saying this.
- People respond better to positive waste prevention words with positive connotations, such as donate, mend and share; make use of them. Negative words are useful for behaviours you’re trying to discourage (e.g. landfill, bin).

FRAMING THE MESSAGE

- Make it clear why people need to make changes to the things they buy, use and throw away – why it is important and what the end goal is.
- People want communications to feel local and be at the community level. Highlight tangible impacts on the local environment or community. Memorable facts and stats will also bring the issue to life.
- Avoid using technical language without clear explanation. Many commonly used environmental terms are not fully understood by all.
- Frame your messages positively. Acknowledge, celebrate and normalise the fact that people are beginning to reduce waste already. Communications could use real people and stories from your community to convey the message.
- To ask residents to move beyond just recycling, acknowledge the efforts that they have been putting into recycling to date. For instance, use language that gives a sense of progress.
- Harness the power of community and social networks. Do your communications have an element of ‘talkability’, with the potential to travel by word of mouth or via social media?
- Ensure that messengers appear trustworthy, transparent and with good, genuine intentions to make a difference.

USER-TESTED WASTE HIERARCHY



SUPPORTING ASSETS

RECYCLING IS GOOD.
BUT WE CAN DO BETTER...



HAVE A 'BUY LESS' MINDSET



RECYCLING IS GOOD.
BUT WE CAN DO BETTER...



SWAP THE WAY YOU SHOP



RECYCLING IS GOOD.
BUT WE CAN DO BETTER...



**USE IT AGAIN,
AND AGAIN...
AND AGAIN**



RECYCLING IS GOOD.
BUT WE CAN DO BETTER...



REHOME IT



RECYCLING IS GOOD. BUT WE CAN DO BETTER...



FINAL THOUGHTS

What this all means is that there are clear ways we can shift behaviour up the hierarchy with simple but effective approaches to communication. Messaging must be carefully composed and framed, and importantly, it needs to be consistent and come from a trustworthy source.

Language that is second nature and highly meaningful to us is not always the same to our audiences. To create the dramatic shift in cultural norms that is needed, we need to adapt the way we're communicating about waste prevention.

With limited budgets to compete with the thousands of advertising messages the UK public see on a daily basis, it's vital that those of us across the industry are speaking with one, unified voice on this topic. Speaking the same language will help reinforce messages, better aid public understanding and ultimately give us a better chance of shifting public behaviour beyond recycling.

As such, we encourage local authorities, behaviour change and waste practitioners, and all other relevant stakeholders to apply these evidence-based approaches to build effective and consistent communications recognised within mainstream public consciousness. If you represent an organisation using any public-facing communications on this topic, we urge you to use the assets created and avoid using any alternative versions of the waste hierarchy with public audiences. With these consistent communication approaches across the sector, we can overcome a significant barrier to encouraging widespread understanding and adoption of waste prevention.

WHAT WE'RE DOING NEXT

Following implementation of the guidance and tools outlined in this report, we welcome feedback from others in the sector, as well as ongoing dialogue and collaboration to continue to build the evidence base.

At Keep Britain Tidy we are continuing our work in this area, both in communicating about waste prevention to better aid understanding and in working to overcome other barriers to its widespread adoption. We are particularly interested in testing the application of the insights in this report in a large-scale behaviour change intervention and will be continuing to grow our annual **Buy Nothing New Month** campaign. As such, we encourage you to look out for opportunities to work together with us on research, behaviour change pilots and campaigns, or to get in touch to discuss how we can support you with your specific waste issues.

Our research has highlighted the vital role that communications have to play in the shift towards a true culture of 'reduce and reuse', and that the public need to hear these repeated messages from all directions. Not only this, people want to hear about how they can make changes for the better. Looking ahead, we therefore want to see the necessary investment in communications about waste prevention, comparable with what we have seen around recycling over the past 20 years. And vitally, alongside this we need investment in infrastructure that facilitates uptake

of waste prevention behaviours, enabling the public to engage in these behaviours. With Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) on the horizon in the UK, some of this progress could be achieved through ringfenced funds being made available to local authorities and others, with the specific aim of tackling the challenge of improving communications on waste prevention. In particular, charities are seen as important and popular messengers on this topic, pointing to the need to fund communications from third sector organisations. More broadly, it is necessary that we begin to see a shift in the current policy landscape of favouring recycling and the linear 'take-make-dispose' economic system. We want to work in partnership with other organisations to be at the forefront of pushing this agenda forward.

Fundamentally, it's clear that the commonly overlooked question of 'how do we best communicate about waste prevention and reducing consumption?' is one significant factor in encouraging people to buy less, maximise the life of the things they own and, ultimately, help to bring natural resource use and carbon emissions down to environmentally sustainable levels.



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