



environmental
services
association

PRESS RELEASE

Waste sector is essential to UK and operatives must be classed as “key-workers”

LONDON, 19 March 2020 – For immediate release

The Environmental Services Association (ESA), the voice of the UK’s recycling and waste management industry, has today called on the government to help keep vital waste services moving, as the closure of schools risks bringing the country to a halt.

The ESA has urgently called on Government to:

- Ensure frontline recycling and waste industry workers are classified as **key workers** and can continue to gain access to childcare, so that they can perform their vital roles – this is the ESA’s number one priority.
- Allow some short-term **flexibility around planning and permitting conditions** to allow services to continue in the event of a reduced workforce, or inability to move recyclable or waste material to its normal destinations.
- Prioritise the sector as a **critical industry** to ensure the continuation of supplies necessary for it to keep operating, such as fuel.
- Ensure that temporary provision is in place to **relieve operators from contractual performance penalties** with the local authorities it serves, during this pandemic. For now, the industry must focus on keeping services running, and not on meeting contractual targets.

Executive Director of the Environmental Services Association (ESA), Jacob Hayler, said: *“The current circumstances are unprecedented and with the closure of schools across the country there is a risk that essential recycling and waste services grind to a halt – allowing waste to pile up in our homes and streets.*

Protecting the ability of employees to come to work is our number one priority so we are urgently calling on government to classify frontline recycling and waste operatives as Key Workers, so they can continue to provide the vital services upon which we all rely.

Our sector also relies heavily on access to fuel, so it is imperative that Government views the recycling and waste management sector as a critical industry so we can keep the wheels turning.

ESA members are concerned that strict operational and technical rules around the operation of waste sites will force otherwise functioning facilities to close. For example, it might not be possible to move waste material to its normal destination, necessitating temporary storage of waste material in larger volumes than would normally be allowed. While ESA members respect these rules and will make every effort to comply with them, we need assurance from Government that temporary unavoidable infractions will not be met with penalties, otherwise essential facilities may have to close.

ESA members provide a large proportion of the recycling and waste management services to local councils across the UK under contract. Normally, operators might incur contractual financial penalties for not meeting agreed performance criteria, such as recycling targets. Our industry needs assurance from Government and local authority partners that any temporary decline in performance measures will not be penalised. ESA members will, of course, continue to provide the best level of service possible, but these are times of crisis and the sector must focus on keeping core services moving – not on meeting targets.

The ESA is in close dialogue with both Defra and the Environment Agency to raise these issues and concerns at the highest levels, so we can provide critical updates to our members on this fast-moving situation.”

Defra has assured the ESA that it is safe for recycling and waste sector workers to continue in their normal roles, as long as they follow correct risk-assessed procedures.

Jacob Hayler added: *“Our sector is well-versed at keeping its employees safe in respect of workplace hygiene, but it is now more important than ever that frontline recycling and waste workers follow the guidance provided by their respective employers regarding safe waste handling practices. While every employer will have its own specific workplace practices, these typically include correctly wearing all of the necessary Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) provided for specific roles; ensuring good personal hygiene practices, particularly in respect of food; and reporting any symptoms of illness promptly.*

The public has been asked by Defra to ensure that any waste produced in a non-medical setting, associated with a person who has symptoms of COVID-19, is double-bagged, tied securely and left inside for at least 72 hours before being placed in the bin, after which time the virus is no longer viable. This is to prevent the transmission of infection and helps protect waste workers. Furthermore, we would urge the public not to put tissues and other sanitary items in their recycling – they should be disposed of in the general waste.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- A. The Environmental Services Association (ESA) is the trade association representing the UK’s resource and waste management industry, which is leading the transformation of how the UK’s waste is managed.
- B. We work with all levels of government, regulators and the public to deliver a more sustainable waste and resource management solution for the UK. ESA’s recent Circular Economy report

'Going for Growth – A practical route to a circular economy', which outlines how a Circular rather than a linear economy can help manage resources sustainably, can be downloaded [here](#).

- C. ESA's Members manage waste on behalf of the whole of society and we are recovering more than ever before. For example, the industry has helped quintuple the UK's household recycling rates over the last decade.

D. The sector at a glance:

- Total turnover: **£11 billion**
- Direct Employment: **106,000 people** (*including waste collection, treatment and materials recovery*)
- Municipal waste handled each year: **27 million tonnes**
- Energy generated (across landfill gas, anaerobic digestion and energy from waste) each year: **approximately 11,867 GWh**, which is 3.5% of the UK's electricity
 - **9,083 GWh of that was renewable electricity** (taking out non-biodegradable portion of EfW) which is **11%** of UK's renewable electricity
- Greenhouse **gas emissions down by 70% since 1990.**
- The **top seven companies account for approximately 40% of turnover**. Many hundreds of SMEs provide either localised or more specialised services
- Waste & recycling is the **most highly rated of all council services** by the public (2016 survey)

For further details please visit www.esauk.org

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