



CASE STUDY: Environment Agency – Tackling Plastic Pollution

Founded in 1996, the Environment Agency strives to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. The Environment Agency works with a number of industries, including the construction industry, to help the sector manage its waste and to ensure the waste is reused, recycled, and disposed of efficiently.

In particular, the Environment Agency is working to tackle the issue of plastic pollution across all sectors of society in efforts to preserve the environment and enhance biodiversity. Their approach to eliminating plastic focuses on three core principles:

- Reducing plastic footprint.
- Researching the issue of plastic pollution to improve understanding of the impact of plastics on the environment.
- Preventing the escape of plastic into the environment through regulation and supporting initiatives with partners and communities.

Plastics and Sustainability Team

In January 2018, the Environment Agency announced it will fund £750,000 for a dedicated team to tackle plastic pollution. The new '**Plastics and Sustainability Team**' aims to reduce the volume of plastic pollution across land, river, and the coastline, by working with businesses, councils, and community action groups, promoting good environmental practices across industries, and encouraging the reduction of single-use plastics.

Part of this initiative is to assess the volume of plastic used on construction sites. Work is underway with partners to identify the most common types of plastic waste and single-use plastics consumed on sites. There will be a focus on addressing this issue, as well as the PPE worn by construction workers. The Environment Agency is also collaborating with [Civil Engineering Contractors Association](#) (CECA) and supply chain delivery partners so a wider view of the industry can be gathered.

Plan Against Plastic

The Environment Agency recognises that urgent action is required to reduce plastic waste in the marine and natural environment. The Environment Agency encourages all industries to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels for the production of virgin plastics, and to reuse or recycle plastics where possible. To address the issue of plastic pollution, the Environment Agency is striving to eliminate all avoidable plastic using a circular economy approach to the product life cycle. This approach includes:

- **The production and design stage:** The Environment Agency will encourage industries to take responsibility for the environmental impact of plastics to ensure that the plastics consumed can be easily reused or recycled. The Environment Agency is currently working with [WRAP](#) to explore plastic free and sustainable alternatives.

- **The construction stage:** The Environment Agency will help industries to reduce the volume of plastic circulation through reducing the demand for single-use plastics.
- **End of use:** The Environment Agency is working with industries to recycle and is engaging with waste management services to increase the proportion of plastic packaging collected and recycled, and to ensure the quality of collected recycled plastics is improved.

25 Year Environmental Plan

In January 2018, the UK government introduced a 25 Year Environmental Plan which sets out what the government will do to improve the environment. The plan is a long term approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, in which the Environment Agency plays a crucial role.

The plan has ambitious targets to achieve over a 25 year period. Two significant targets the Environment Agency is helping industries to meet include: minimising waste and increasing resource efficiency.

The Environment Agency is helping industries to minimise waste by:

- Working towards zero avoidable waste by 2050.
- Working to a target of eliminating avoidable plastic waste by 2042.
- Significantly reducing and where possible, preventing all kinds of plastic pollution.
- Striving to meet all existing waste targets, including those of landfill, reuse, and recycling.
- Encouraging the reuse of materials where possible at end of life to minimise the impact on the environment.

In addition, the Environment Agency will help industries to become more resource efficient by introducing the following measures:

- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently.
- Encouraging the use of materials, particularly plastics, that can be reused or recycled.
- Using materials with a high recycled content to maximise the value we receive from resources.

Resources and Waste Strategy

In December 2018, the Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) released the Resources and Waste Strategy. The strategy aims to maximise the value of the resources we use, minimise the waste we create, cut emissions, and help produce a greener, healthier planet.

In particular, the strategy strives to tackle plastic pollution. The UK uses five million tonnes of plastic every year, most of which ends up in landfill or polluting the natural environment. The Environment Agency's priority is to continue to prevent plastic entering the environment in the first place, and eliminating all avoidable plastic waste over the lifetime of the 25 Year Environmental Plan.

To help achieve this, the government is supporting the [UK Plastics Pact](#), a collaborative initiative to create a circular system that keeps plastic in the economy and out of the environment.

The strategy also emphasises that it is developing plans to increase resource efficiency and minimise waste in the construction industry. Construction represents a major material resource flow in the economy, such material flows inevitably creates waste, with the UK construction industry estimated to have produced around 120 million tonnes of waste in 2014.

The Construction Sector Deal aims to increase resource efficiency in construction through delivering an investment of up to £420 million between the industry and the government to accelerate this transform and to offer the opportunity to reduce waste and increase productivity.

The government is also working with the [Green Construction Board](#) which has developed guidance for increasing resource efficiency and reducing waste in the construction industry through the adoption of circular economy principles. The Environment Agency will continue to work with the Green Construction Board to establish a definition of zero avoidable waste in the sector, and to develop an ambitious road map by 2020, setting out how and when this will be achieved.

Right Waste, Right Place Campaign

The Environment Agency encourages the construction industry to promote and engage with the [Right Waste, Right Place](#) campaign.

Right Waste, Right Place is an information campaign delivered by the Environment Services Association to help businesses to meet their Duty of Care obligations. Duty of Care applies to any business that produces, treats, transports, or disposes of waste, as a result of its activities. This has been the case since the Environment Protection Act became law in 1995.

In the construction industry, the Duty of Care obligations are poorly understood. It is important then that all aspects of the industry are aware of the campaign and understand how they should manage their waste to protect the environment and to avoid prosecution from failing to control waste.

To find out more about the Environment Agency, please click [here](#) to visit their website.