

## Incinerators: Health Hazards

### Environment Food and Rural Affairs

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1. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 19 Jul 2010

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 125W, on incinerators: health hazards, if she will request that the **Environment Agency** publish its own protocol for the representative sampling and testing of incinerator bottom ash for H14 Ecotoxicity in circumstances in which the **Environmental Services Association** is unable to complete a protocol to the satisfaction of the Environment Agency.

**Richard Benyon** (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Natural Environment and Fisheries), Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Newbury, Conservative)

The **Environment Agency** has no plans to produce a protocol specifically for assessing H14 ecotoxicity of incinerator bottom ash (**IBA**). Representative sampling of IBA is already required in order to satisfy the waste incineration directive.

2. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 19 Jul 2010

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make the undertaking of representative sampling and testing protocol for H14 ecotoxicity of incinerator bottom ash a condition for the granting of environmental permits for waste incinerators.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 19 July 2010, c7W)

**Richard Benyon** (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Natural Environment and Fisheries), Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Newbury, Conservative)

The Environment Agency does not intend to make this a permit condition. Assessment of incinerator bottom ash to determine whether it is hazardous (including h14 ecotoxicity testing) is a requirement of the hazardous waste regulations, which apply directly to all producers of hazardous waste. There is no need to repeat the requirement within a permit application.

3. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 19 Jul 2010

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will direct the **Environment Agency** to (a) adopt and (b) document in its **Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control** guidance a representative sampling and testing protocol for incinerator bottom ash as part of its **Best Available Techniques**.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 19 July 2010, c7W)

**Richard Benyon** (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Natural Environment and Fisheries), Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Newbury, Conservative)

Permits for incinerators already have a condition that requires sampling and testing of incinerator bottom ash to satisfy the requirements of the waste incineration directive. This must be carried out representatively and using techniques conforming to an ash sampling protocol issued by the **Environment Agency** in 2001.

In light of developments in techniques, the Environment Agency is currently updating its protocol for ash sampling. This is expected to be completed by the end of 2010.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 19 July 2010, c8W)

4. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 22 Jun 2010

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

*(1) whether she plans to bring forward a protocol for assessing the toxicity of soil contaminated by incinerator bottom ash;*

*(2) if she will publish the adopted sampling protocol for assessing the ecotoxicity of incinerator bottom ash;*

*(3) if she will ensure that the adopted protocol for sampling incinerator bottom ash to assess ecotoxicity will require representative sampling;*

*(4) when her Department began its discussions with the **Environmental Services Association** on sampling procedures for H14 ecotoxicity of incinerator bottom ash; and what the outcomes were of those discussions;*

*(5) if she will take steps to ensure that incinerator bottom ash which is ecotoxic or hazardous is appropriately classified and sent to hazardous landfill;*

*(6) when she plans to publish a protocol for the sampling of incinerator bottom ash.*

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 22 June 2010, c125W)

**Richard Benyon** (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Natural Environment and Fisheries), Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Newbury, Conservative)

The **Environmental Services Association (ESA)** has been developing the sampling protocol for assessing the ecotoxicity of incinerator bottom ash (**IBA**) for some time. It had been expected to be published earlier this year. The ESA will publish the document once it is completed to the satisfaction of the **Environment Agency**. The sampling protocol being prepared by ESA is based on representative sampling. The Environment Agency is not aware of any examples of soil contamination by IBA. It is the responsibility of any waste holder to ensure that the waste is correctly classified and managed accordingly. Any waste identified as hazardous should be managed in accordance with the relevant waste legislation to protect human health and the environment. This may include appropriate treatment and recovery, or controlled landfill. It is the role of the Environment Agency to enforce the waste legislation.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 22 June 2010, c125W)

5. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 15 Dec 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will review the licensing conditions relating to incinerator operators for the purposes of imposing requirements for more detailed reporting, with particular reference to (a) quarterly reports for incinerator bottom ash and (b) test results for H14 ecotoxicity.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 15 December 2009, c976W)

**Dan Norris** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Wansdyke, Labour)

There is no legal requirement for more detailed reporting under current **UK** or **EU** legislation. There is also no requirement to provide information on H14 testing (or any hazardous waste assessment) under Hazardous Waste Regulations or Environmental Permitting Regulations.

6. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 15 Dec 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress his Department has made on the sampling of incinerator bottom ash for the purposes of classifying batches as hazardous or non-hazardous.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 15 December 2009, c976W)

**Dan Norris** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Wansdyke, Labour)

The Environmental Services Association is currently finalising a sampling protocol that can be used to help the assessment of incinerator bottom ash.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 15 December 2009, c976W)

7. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 15 Dec 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will direct the **Environment Agency** to make available on its website the quarterly reports produced by incinerator operators on (a) discharges and (b) tests on incinerator bottom ash from their licensed facilities.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 15 December 2009, c976W)

**Dan Norris** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Wansdyke, Labour)

The **Environment Agency** makes these reports available on its public registers. These can be viewed at the regional offices relevant to each facility. They are not stored electronically.

8. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 22 Jun 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what auditing of the records of incinerator operators the **Environment Agency** undertakes to establish compliance with the law in relation to H14 ecotoxicity testing of incinerator bottom ash prior to its disposal.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 22 June 2009, c574W)

**Dan Norris** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Wansdyke, Labour)

holding answer 9 June 2009

Hazardous waste legislation requires that the bottom ash arising from municipal waste incinerators is assessed for ecotoxicity (property H14) prior to disposal. The legislation does not require operators to submit the results to the **Environment Agency**.

9. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 25 Mar 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with reference to the answer of 14 July 2008, **Hansard, column 32W**, on incinerators: waste disposal, if he will publish the results of the public consultation on H14 ecotoxicity testing held in October 2007.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 25 March 2009, c381W)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)  
holding answer 18 March 2009

The results of the consultation were a revision to the **Environment Agency's** guidance on hazardous waste, **WM2** which is published on its website.

10. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 23 Mar 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether incinerator operators are required to test incinerator bottom ash for H14 ecotoxicity; and if he will make a statement.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 23 March 2009, c51W)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)  
holding answer 18 March 2009

Incinerator operators are required to test and assess their bottom ash for all hazards including H14.

11. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 23 Mar 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that the results of the ecotoxicity testing of incinerator bottom ash are included in the **Environment Agency** regional registers.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 23 March 2009, c52W)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)  
holding answer 18 March 2009

Assessments for hazardous waste by waste producers are not submitted to the **Environment Agency**. There is no legislative requirement for producers to do this and hence no inclusion on registers.

12. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 23 Mar 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will make an assessment of the registers held by the **Environment Agency** of reports on incinerator bottom ash for the purposes of determining whether its composition exceeds permitted levels for harmful substances.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 11 March 2009, c437W)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)

holding answer 12 February 2009

Monitoring data on certain heavy metals, loss on ignition (the change in weight recorded when the ash is heated to a high temperature) and the total organic carbon in incinerator bottom ash is provided by the incinerator operators. This is placed upon the **Environment Agency** public registers. These data are checked by the Environment Agency upon receipt. Limits are set on loss on ignition/total organic carbon to ensure that the incinerator is operating efficiently. No breaches of these limits have been reported hence no enforcement action has been taken. Limits are not set on the heavy metal content of the ash as a permit condition. The operator is expected to carry out more detailed analysis before the ash can be disposed of.

13. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 11 Mar 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will consult (a) stakeholders, (b) experts and (c) other bodies on procedures for H14 ecotoxicity testing of incinerator bottom ash.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 11 March 2009, c437W)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)

holding answer 12 February 2009

Incinerator bottom ash is not tested directly for ecotoxicity as this would involve unnecessary expense and unwarranted animal testing. Instead, chemical analysis is undertaken using standard methods and the ash is assessed for ecotoxicity by reference to the criteria for levels of dangerous substances given in the **Environment Agency's** Technical Guidance **WM2** "Hazardous waste: interpretation of the definition and

classification of hazardous waste, 2nd edition, version 2.2". The Environment Agency has been working with the **Environmental Services Association** to ensure that the procedures used to assess incinerator bottom ash are both robust and technically appropriate.

14. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 3 Mar 2009

I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this important issue, which affects one of our neighbouring counties and our hon. Friend **Mr. Drew**. Will he add to the issues that need to be raised the question of the safety or otherwise of incinerator bottom ash? I have asked a number of questions about that and it appears that the **Environment Agency** is now changing its previous statements that all incinerator bottom ash is classified as non-hazardous; those statements seem no longer to be applicable. It also appears that the H14 ecotoxicity testing described in its waste manual is now a requirement. Would it not help if my right hon. Friend the **Minister** clarified whether that is now required and whether the results of such testing should be made public in regional registers, so that people can judge for themselves the hazardous nature of the material to which they might be exposed?

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 3 March 2009, c232WH)

**Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester, Labour)

I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend; I am sure that the **Minister** will tackle that point. He makes the point that many Gloucestershire residents—it is not just the city of Gloucester or Stroud residents—are concerned about the issue, not least, as I said, residents of **Bishop's Cleeve**, who were demonstrating as recently as last week.

One argument that the council is using, other than blaming the Government for its local decisions, is to say, "Well, what is the alternative?" If people ask around and study things, they find alternatives. There are alternatives out there. We work closely with Gloucestershire's Friends of the Earth network. We have also been listening to what local residents have had to say. There are a number of things that Gloucestershire county council can do, rather than rushing to build this 10-storey beast that will burn 175,000 tonnes a year.

First, the six authorities in Gloucestershire could start working together coherently. In my part of the world, 36 per cent. of waste is currently recycled. In the **constituency** of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud,

the figure is 50-something per cent. However, if the six authorities worked together, there would not be, for example, an ability to collect and recycle green waste in my **constituency** but not in the **constituency** next door. There would not be an ability to recycle bottles with their tops on in Stroud, but not in Gloucester. Nor would it be the case that food waste could be collected in some parts of the county but not others. Quite simply, the authorities do not work together, so a single coherent strategy would help and no doubt boost recycling levels. What levels of recycling should we be aiming for? **The Netherlands** is already at 65 per cent. The figure is 58 per cent. for Germany and 59 per cent. for Austria, but we do not have to go that far afield to find good examples of high levels of recycling. St. Arvans, in Monmouthshire, is a zero-waste project promoting waste separation and the kerbside collection of paper, glass, cans, foil, textiles—I will run out of fingers—plastics, **Tetra Pak**, cartons, green waste and food waste. Some 73 per cent. of waste is diverted from landfill in that part of Monmouthshire, and there is a 95 per cent. participation rate. Surely, instead of looking to lower levels of recycling in Gloucestershire and saying, "Well, we have this machine. We'll just keep chugging along, widening our carbon footprint and bringing in waste from further afield to keep things ticking over," we should look at the issue more imaginatively and work more closely with Gloucestershire Friends of the Earth.

For many reasons, the incinerator could be something of an eco-disaster. Kent county council's environment spokesperson, Keith Ferrin, recently said that the council's decision to build an incinerator was "stupid" with hindsight, adding:

*"The people who thought they were being very clever and economical with people's money ten years ago have produced a situation where the reverse is true, as **KCC** is now committed to a contract we can't get out of."*

In Gloucestershire's case, it would be a 25-year contract, so we would be committed to a programme that we could not get out of for 25 years and which ruled out any emerging technologies or local flexibility. Councillor Ferrin continued:

*"What seemed a very wise decision a very long time ago is a very stupid one today...At the time, people were saying nationally that this was the only way ahead. But if you make a*

*prediction for 10 years' time, the only thing you can be certain of is that it will be the wrong decision."*

I would like our local authority to be more aware of some of the new, emerging technologies. Just this week, I was handed an article from **The Birmingham Post**, which talks about some of the new technologies that are coming on stream in Birmingham:

*"Regular disposable nappies which take hundreds of years to rot on the nation's landfill sites could soon be recycled at a new £12 million Birmingham-based facility—the first of its kind in the **UK**...they plan to turn up to 36,000 tonnes of Pampers, Huggies and adult incontinence products a year into plastic cladding and roof tiles."*

Surely, that must be the way forward. The article continues:

*"Meanwhile, methane from the production process can be sold to the **National Grid** and turned into energy and anything left used for compost."*

We have been told a lot of half-truths in Gloucestershire. We have also been told some outright lies, and I read earlier from the Conservative council's manifesto. Unfortunately, I sense a fear among local politicians, who will not speak up on the issue and who are keeping their heads down. It is time for them to speak up for the thousands of people in my **constituency** who fear for the quality of their lives and who fear what is happening to house prices because of a decision that will be made after the 2009 local elections, but which is hanging over their heads in the interim. People are also fed up with the council turning areas of my **constituency** such as Quedgeley into a dumping ground for all the county's problems.

I ask my right hon. Friend the **Minister** whether the council could have bid for something other than an incinerator with **PFI** funding. I suspect that it could. We should take on board what Friends of the Earth is saying locally and increase the level of recycling to 80 per cent. by 2020 by having greater kerbside separation of waste and small local residual waste management facilities that match the scale, form and size of their surroundings to make them acceptable to local communities—facilities that handle between 5,000 and 35,000 tonnes per annum. If we do, we will achieve more flexible, local solutions, and there will be greater

ownership of facilities by communities. Similarly, there will be more investment in composting and more anaerobic digestion. That has to be the way forward.

Finally, does my right hon. Friend agree that we should look at the way in which our local authorities spend their money? I am looking at the pledges that they make in county council elections and at whether they fulfil those pledges? I repeat the words of the **Tory** party in 2005:

*"We will: Oppose incinerators. **Conservatives** have already worked to stop incinerators being built in Gloucestershire and we will continue to do so."*

That is actually a worthless pledge.

**David Drew** (Stroud, Labour)

I am grateful to my hon. Friend **Mr. Dhanda** for giving me a few minutes, and I shall be brief so that my right hon. Friend the **Minister** can sufficiently respond to my question.

I want to make four quick points, beginning with an issue that I am sure is sufficient to

for an argument in favour of incineration; it set out the collapse of the case that the seven authorities in Gloucestershire tried to put to it. Those authorities were fighting like ferrets in a sack after the first day, and I should know because I was there. That says something about the ineffectiveness of local government in Gloucestershire. Furthermore, when the inspector published his report, he suggested three sites, including Javelin Park, could be part of the answer if we were looking for a mechanical and biological treatment centre. However, he did not see such a centre as the answer to Gloucestershire's waste problems, although that has been said.

Sadly, we have already seen the results of what has been going on. An interesting experiment has been going on in the Stanleys wards in my **constituency**, which has been composting food waste. The district council, which is Conservative run, has just announced that it intends to stop that experiment—it is certainly not introducing it across the district. That is entirely down to the fact that it is prejudging what will happen to that waste—that it will be taken to an incinerator and burned. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester said, that is the very negation of the way in which we should collect and dispose of waste.

Lastly—I shall be very careful what I say—the **Select Committee** on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is looking at the issue of waste, as my right hon. Friend the **Minister** knows. Mary Newton from Gloucestershire Friends of the Earth, who has helped us greatly, has submitted a paper, which I advise everybody to read. It is fair to say, without going into details, that the days of incineration have largely gone. There are better alternatives, and different ways to do things, and I hope that that approach is what the Select Committee will propose; I cannot pre-empt its final report. An old technology is being foisted on some people in Gloucestershire, for all the wrong reasons. I hope that my right hon. Friend can help us, and get some sense put back into the county of Gloucestershire, because it is sadly lacking at the moment.

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 3 March 2009, c234WH)

[Add an annotation](#) (e.g. more info, blog post or wikipedia article)

12:50 pm

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)

I am delighted to be here this afternoon, Mr. Pope, debating this subject, in which I know you take great interest. I look forward to visiting the

wonderful **constituency** that you have the honour to represent, to see the Chic Sheds project, which is one I recommend to all Members of the House, for its maximisation of resource use.

My hon. Friend **Mr. Dhanda** has provided an opportunity today to debate an important subject. I know that my right hon. Friend **Mr. Smith** has asked several questions about people's concerns about regeneration. In particular, he has explored concerns about bottom ash. I cannot give him a detailed response to the question that he asked this afternoon, but I can offer to write to him with further details. I assure him that we need to find answers to some of the concerns in the public's mind about the kind of technology in question, if we are to make progress in meeting the tough targets we have set ourselves—and, indeed, that the **European Commission** has set—for landfill reduction.

The Gloucestershire private finance initiative scheme is an instance in which the Government have made funding available through **PFI** credits. However, the choice of technology and the location are a local decision. Decisions on how to manage waste and meet targets are a matter for each authority, and rightly so. The Government do not generally have a preference for one energy-from-waste technology over another, with the exception of anaerobic digestion for treating food waste, and it is important that plans for all waste facilities should emerge from local waste strategies, so that all options for reuse, recycling and composting can be explored first. The technology choice needs to reflect local circumstances, which will vary, and it is the responsibility of local authorities to decide on the most appropriate solutions for their areas. The Government are fully committed to managing waste in the most sustainable way, by preventing waste, and by recycling or composting as much of the unavoidable waste as possible. However, the country needs residual waste treatment infrastructure as well. There will always be some residual waste, even after the significant increases that we all want in waste prevention, reuse and recycling. Our preference is to manage that waste as far up the waste hierarchy as possible, with energy from waste ranking higher than landfill, which is the end of the line. Reducing our reliance on landfill is an essential part of the drive to tackle climate change. A combination of all the activities I have mentioned is essential to ensure that we meet our obligations under the **EU** landfill directive. Generating renewable energy from residual waste has energy and carbon benefits, through avoiding greenhouse gas emissions from landfill and

with energy from the biodegradable fraction of waste displacing fossil fuel-based power generation. Our aim is to maximise the generation of renewable energy recovered from unavoidable residual waste, as demonstrated in a range of measures in the Energy Act 2008 and set out in our forthcoming renewable energy strategy. All PFI projects, however, need to highlight their continued ambitions for waste minimisation and recycling, such as Gloucestershire's aim of reaching 60 per cent recycling by 2020.

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 3 March 2009, c236WH)  
[Add an annotation](#) (e.g. more info, blog post or wikipedia article)

**Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester, Labour)

That is another statistic that keeps getting regurgitated locally, in a way that is unfair, I think, to Government, because the local authority implies that the Government want only 60 per cent. as a target. There is nothing to prevent the local authority, if it chooses, from adopting a higher recycling level than 60 per cent. Is that not the case?

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 3 March 2009, c237WH)  
[Add an annotation](#) (e.g. more info, blog post or wikipedia article)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)

My hon. Friend is right; as I have said, the development of the local waste strategy is a matter for local authorities. It is worth bearing in mind the fact that other European countries manage high recycling rates alongside incineration, of the order of 40 to 50 per cent. However, my hon. Friend is right; there would be nothing to put a cap on that ambition, other than making sure that the strategies were coherent and the infrastructure was in place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester asked what other technologies Gloucestershire county council might have examined, to determine what technology to adopt. There are other technologies, such as anaerobic digestion, which I have already mentioned. Gasification is another; that is combined heat and power. Mechanical biological treatment is another. Those are generally smaller installations, but are none the less viable alternatives. Even then, however, we look for flexibility in the final contract, so that ambitions such as Gloucestershire's are not capped by any new facility supported by **PFI** credits.

On the issue of Gloucestershire county council's waste proposals, the authority submitted an application to **DEFRA** for PFI credits to deliver new waste management infrastructure. Support for the project was provisionally approved by the Under-**Secretary of State** for Energy and **Climate Change**, my hon. Friend **Joan Ruddock**, in August 2008. I was pleased to visit Stroud in October with my hon. Friend **Mr. Drew**. We met farmers, but we also took the opportunity to look at the Javelin Park site. It is important to know that the project was considered by the Treasury-led cross-departmental project review group, which has provisionally approved it subject to certain conditions: those are the acquisition of a suitable site and making the project subject to **PRG** second-stage review during the later stages of procurement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud asked whether the project was predicated on procurement of the site. The remit we give local authorities is that any authority bidding for PFI credits in such circumstances must offer a site to the market. It is the authority's decision which site to put to the market. However, may I clarify something? As part of the application process, all authorities must submit a plan based on a theoretical model that uses real figures and facts to demonstrate that the project is robust enough to proceed. That does not mean that the technology for the waste PFI project has been decided, but the plan is used to guide the procurement process, for the purpose of finding partners for a PFI project.

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 3 March 2009, c237WH)

**Parmjit Dhandra** (Gloucester, Labour)

From what my right hon. Friend tells me, the authority is going through a process at the moment, but there would be nothing to stop it, or indeed another county council led by another political party—my own or any other—saying, "That is the path we were going along, but we have now changed our mind and will look at other alternatives." They could, technically, put a stop to the whole incinerator plan, could they not?

- [Link to this](#)
  - [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 3 March 2009, c238WH)
- [Add an annotation](#) (e.g. more info, blog post or wikipedia article)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)

That would obviously be entirely for a county council to decide.

Gloucestershire county council could change direction, whatever political control it was under. I hesitate to take up my hon. Friend's suggestion

that we might want to hold political parties to account for what they say. I

Thames North East Area Office, Apollo Court, Bishops Square Business Park, St. Albans Road West, Hatfield <b>AL10 9EX</b>	Edmonton
Solent and South Downs Office, Colvedene Court, Colden Common <b>SO21 1WP</b>	Isle of Wight, Fawley (Hazardous), Marchwood, Portsmouth
North West Region, Southern Area Office, <b>Appleton House</b> , 430 Birchwood Boulevard, Warrington <b>WA3 7WD</b>	<b>Ellesmere Port</b> (Hazardous), Bolton
Dales Area Office, Coverdale House, Aviator Court, Amy Johnson Way, Clifton Moor <b>YO30 4GZ</b>	Billingham
Kent and East Sussex Area Office, <b>Orchard House, Endeavour Park, London Road</b> , Addington, West Mailing <b>ME19 5SH</b>	Maidstone (Allington)
Anglian Northern Area Office, Lincoln Office, Waterside House, Waterside North, Lincoln <b>LN2 5HA</b>	Grimsby (Newlincs)

16. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 3 Feb 2009

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times the permitted level of harmful substances in incinerator bottom ash has been exceeded in the last five years.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 3 February 2009, c1084W)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State (Farming and the Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour) holding answer 28 January 2009

Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. Monitoring data relating to installations permitted under the Environmental Permitting Regulations (**England and Wales**) 2007 (formerly the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations) may be obtained via the public register section of the **Environment Agency's** website.

17. Andrew Smith (Oxford East, Labour) 14 Oct 2008

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information his Department uses when formulating guidance for the public and local authorities about the assessment of safety of incinerator bottom ash.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 14 October 2008, c1046W)



**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)

My Department has not produced any guidance on the assessment of the safety of incinerator bottom ash. The **Environment Agency**, as the principal regulator for the waste controls in **England and Wales**, has recently produced a position note on the classification of incinerator bottom ash, which is available on their website.

18. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 14 October 2008

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

*(1) what research the **Environment Agency** has undertaken in conjunction with the **Environmental Services Association** to evaluate the toxicity testing of incinerator bottom ash;*

*(2) what are the most recent test results on the toxicity of incinerator bottom ash to have been made public;*

*(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the study undertaken by the Environmental Services Association with the support of the Environment Agency on H14 ecotoxicity testing of incinerator bottom ash.*

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 14 October 2008, c1046W)

**Jane Kennedy** (Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Liverpool, Wavertree, Labour)

The **Environment Agency** has not undertaken any research in conjunction with the **Environmental Services Association** to evaluate the toxicity testing of incinerator bottom ash. However, we understand a study was undertaken by the Environmental Services Association into this issue, but the Department has not seen and does not possess its results. More generally, the operators of incinerators are required by their environmental permits to report periodically on the elemental composition of the bottom ashes produced by the incinerators. These reports do not equate to test results on toxicity testing. The reports are placed on the Environment Agency's Public Register and can be inspected at the Environment Agency's Area offices.

19 **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 14 Jul 2008

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will publish the results of the sampling studies which informed the recently revised Environment Agency **WM2** guidance on incinerator bottom ash.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 14 July 2008, c30W)

**Joan Ruddock** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Lewisham, Deptford, Labour)

The recent revision to **WM2** (technical guidance on the interpretation of the definition and classification of hazardous wastes) was required due to changes to European chemical legislation (approved supply list) and was not the result of any sampling studies on incinerator bottom ash.

20 **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 14 Jul 2008

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether further changes are proposed to Environment Agency **WM2** guidance on incinerator bottom ash; and if he will undertake public consultation on any further changes.

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 14 July 2008, c30W)

**Joan Ruddock** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Lewisham, Deptford, Labour)

The Environment Agency does not propose any further changes to **WM2** (technical guidance on the interpretation of the definition and classification of hazardous wastes) at this time.

The recent review to the chapter on the assessment of ecotoxicity was published on 16 May 2008. The assessment of ecotoxicity is applicable to all wastes and not just incinerator bottom ash. This review underwent external consultation in October 2007, as would any change to **WM2**.

21. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 3 Mar 2008

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

*(1) when consultations have taken place with incinerator operators on an eco-toxity test for incinerator bottom ash;*

*(2) what testing his Department has commissioned of the toxicity of incinerator bottom ash;*

*(3) what consultation he plans on the testing regime for incinerator bottom ash;*

*(4) what the timetable is for the introduction of the new test of toxicity for incinerator bottom ash.*

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 3 March 2008, c2068W)
- **Joan Ruddock** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Lewisham, Deptford, Labour)

I understand that the waste industry is taking forward an initiative to identify a protocol for the ecotoxicity testing of Incineration Bottom Ash (**IBA**). The initiative will use a direct testing method on IBA, where the

validity of classification results from the desktop method remains uncertain. This uncertainty arises because of the potential for ecotoxic metal substances in IBA to exist as the metal or other non-ecotoxic form; something that the desktop analytical method cannot determine.

**DEFRA** and the **Environment Agency** support this initiative, considering that the classification of IBA will remain "non-hazardous" pending the results of the direct testing.

The Environment Agency will review this decision when results from direct testing have been provided. No consultation is planned by my Department on this issue.

## 22. Waste recycling

**Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 6 Feb 2008

I congratulate my hon. Friend **Dr. Gibson** on securing the debate and on his interesting and entertaining speech. I agree with him about the strength of public interest in this important issue and the fact that that is a good sign of public concern about the sustainability of the environment in general. We are all increasingly aware that recycling can make a huge contribution to the conservation of resources and energy, and that must be the first line of defence and action against climate change. As he said, we are making progress, but there is still a long way to go in reducing landfill and in increasing recycling to the level of the best of our European neighbours.

I want to raise a few points by way of questions to the **Minister**, who is committed to dealing with these issues. First, to follow on from the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North, will she say more about the action that the Government are taking on commercial and industrial waste, which is an important dimension of the challenge that we face? In particular, has she considered imposing a ban on the landfilling and incineration of material that can be recycled or composted? Looking to the future, those are the sort of issues on which we need to be giving the right signals.

My second concern is about what can be done to improve the recycling of aluminium, which it is particularly important to recycle, given that a lot of energy is needed to produce aluminium from its ore, bauxite. Recycling it would therefore make significant energy savings and help to combat climate change.

That raises the vexed question of incineration, which my hon. Friend mentioned. When municipal waste is incinerated, aluminium in the form

of cans, foil and so on is rendered useless and non-recoverable. I would be grateful if the **Minister** explained how the expansion of incineration can be reconciled with improved rates of aluminium recovery and, indeed, with our concern about climate change.

I would also like to ask the **Minister** whether she foresees waste incineration, like other industrial processes, being subject to some kind of carbon pricing. In Oxfordshire, the county council proposes to build a 200,000 tonnes a year incinerator. On reasonable assumptions, and using the Government's 2007 **shadow** price for carbon emissions of £25.50 a tonne, that would result in an annual charge of about £5.1 million, which would rise substantially as the **shadow** price went up in future years. At the moment, that environmental cost is not factored into the decision on incineration. Does she agree that it should be?

**Martin Horwood** (Shadow Minister (Environment), Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; Cheltenham, Liberal Democrat)

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree not only that it is right to incorporate the **shadow** cost of carbon into such calculations, but that the **shadow** cost that the Government are using is much lower than the one recommended in the Stern report, so the real picture is even worse than he suggests?

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 6 February 2008, c276WH)

**Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour)

I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but it would be fair to point out that the Government envisage costs rising significantly in the future, which reinforces my point that we should factor in the real future cost of emissions from burning such volumes of waste in incinerators. Of course, we should take the best independent advice on the appropriate price. Finally, do the Government intend to encourage, or even force, industry to recycle much more packaging by increasing the targets in the packaging regulations? We are waiting for the Government to make an announcement on that some time soon, and if the **Minister** is unable to make an announcement this afternoon, it would be helpful if she told us when she will be able to make one.

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 6 February 2008, c276WH)

[Add an annotation](#) (e.g. more info, blog post or wikipedia article)

3:16 pm

**Eric Illsley** (Barnsley Central, Labour)

I congratulate my hon. Friend **Dr. Gibson** on securing the debate and I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words in the next few minutes.

I want to follow on from the point on which my right hon. Friend **Mr. Smith** finished. He mentioned levels of packaging waste, and I should declare an interest as the chairman of the all-party group on the packaging manufacturing industry. My first point on packaging waste is that only 3 per cent. of it goes to landfill, while the rest is recycled or dealt with in other ways. A minimal amount of packaging therefore goes to landfill, and it is difficult to see how increasing the targets will bring any further benefits. We have a bigger problem with household waste and particularly food waste, because we waste about 30 per cent. of the food that we produce, and it all goes to landfill.

My main point, however, relates to recycling systems, which my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North mentioned. One problem is that the recycling targets placed on local authorities are completely different from those placed on industry. As we have heard, different systems are in place throughout the country. The good news is that about 98 per cent. of the country is covered by local authority recycling systems, but the problem is that they are all slightly different, and different authorities collect different materials in different parts of the country.

We therefore have different targets. Local authorities are required to collect recycling materials in terms of their tonnage, whereas industry is required to recycle in terms of specific sectors and materials. It does not matter, therefore, how local authorities collect materials, which are simply jumbled up in collection systems throughout the country. When they arrive at industry facilities to be recycled, therefore, they are often unusable, which is why so much is sent to places such as China, as my hon. Friend said. I therefore ask the **Minister** to look at ways of bringing the recycling systems into sync with the collection systems and of getting local authorities to collect materials in such a way that they can be recycled.

I shall give a couple of examples. My local industry in Barnsley is glass containers, and the first bottle bank, as it was called then, was introduced on 24 April 1977 in Barnsley. We should rename them glass banks, of course, because contrary to the opinion of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North they do not always collect only wine bottles; other glass items can be recycled as well. It was a way of collecting glass to be

reused in the glass industry, because glass is a perfectly recyclable product. A glass bottle is melted, and it reconstitutes itself as glass. The problem is that if the colours are mixed together the glass all comes out green. If clear and flint glass or clear and amber glass are mixed, they turn green. Given the number of green bottles that we import into the country from wine-growing areas, we are awash with green glass, and the stuff is unusable for recycling except in road materials.

The quality of what we are now recycling is not very good. One of the biggest glass companies in this country is called **Owens-Illinois**, which recently bought United Glass. United Glass has a plant at Harlow in Essex, which I visited many years ago to see how it recycled its glass products. Owens-Illinois refuses to use the glass recycled from that plant, even though it owns it, because it is of such poor quality. It goes elsewhere to find a recycler that it wants to use in its glass production. There is thus an idea that we are co-mingling and not getting the synchronisation right between what industry can recycle and what is being collected. We have heard already that some local authorities do not recycle some materials that others will. Plastics is one example of a material that many local authorities will not recycle, although it is a valuable product when it is recycled. We should be doing a lot more to collect and recycle that product.

We need to improve. I have recently been given a press release on behalf of a company called Catalyst, which has made an estimate of what the cost of incineration will be as a consequence of the Government's waste strategy. It states that to meet

*"the Government's objectives, as laid out in their Waste Strategy 2007 paper, the level of incinerated municipal waste will have to increase from 3 million tonnes per year today to 11.5 million tonnes by 2020—and this requires investment of circa £5 billion in some 50 plants."*

Incineration is something that many local authorities do not want on their doorstep, as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North pointed out, but unless we recycle more, because we are running out of landfill, incineration is becoming the only alternative. It will require major investment.

I have one or two final points. The first is about lightweighting. The Government have made much of the idea that industry should lightweight products and packaging. Lightweighting simply means

making something lighter. A bottle such as those we have before us today could be made with thinner glass and a certain number of grams of glass could be taken out of the product. It seems a very good idea, and one wonders why industry has not already done it. It would mean that industry used less glass to produce a unit—a bottle. The problem is, on a life cycle analysis, that because the product is lighter it is more fragile, and so in transporting the product the pallets, carriers and containers must be stronger. More energy is used to produce the pallets to carry the lightweighted product, so in the end we do not really save anything through lightweighting.

The plastic bag issue that is coming before Parliament is a popular one. My hon. Friend mentioned the plastic bag-free town in Devon, a local authority has a Bill before Parliament on the issue, and there is talk of China and **New York** banning plastic bags. Yes, everyone would like a reduction in the number of plastic bags littering our country. However, we must act so as to achieve what we set out to achieve, and not do as Ireland did. The tax on plastic bags meant that people did not buy them, or some supermarkets did not make them available, yet the production of plastic increased, because people found other types of plastic container to use as a substitute. We must encourage people to cut their use, or use alternatives, and not simply ban them outright or tax them, with the result that people look elsewhere to meet their needs.

- [Link to this](#)
  - [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 6 February 2008, c276WH)
- [Add an annotation](#) (e.g. more info, blog post or wikipedia article)

3:25 pm

**Martin Horwood** (Shadow Minister (Environment), Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; Cheltenham, Liberal Democrat)

I add my congratulations to those already offered by other hon. Members to **Dr. Gibson** on securing the debate and, as ever, displaying great technical knowledge of the subject. He is right to highlight our poor position in the international league table on recycling and waste, but he is also right to give credit where it is due to the Government for some important initiatives.

There is a question that politicians are always asked at the hustings, which they slightly dread, about which of their opponents' policies they support. My two stock answers—with respect to the Government, at least—have always been **Sure Start**, which I have always thought is an excellent programme for early **intervention** in children's lives, and the

business resource efficiency and waste programme, which is an imaginative programme that has done important work on improving waste resource efficiency and recycling.

The waste strategy contains many positive intentions and ideas, but in general it has not gone far enough. **BREW** stands out as an initiative that is working very well. I think that the **Prime Minister** agrees with me, because on a recent visit to China he used the national industrial symbiosis programme as a model, encouraged the Chinese to follow with a similar programme of their own and offered them our expertise in doing so. That programme clearly has the backing of Ministers at a very senior level, which is important, because, as the hon. Member for Norwich, North has stressed, household waste is a minor part of the overall mix—I think that it comprises less than 10 per cent. of **UK** waste—whereas **BREW** uniquely addresses commercial and industrial waste.

**NISP**'s performance is certainly dramatic. The hon. Gentleman has quoted some statistics, but **NISP** says that it has saved UK industry more than £70 million, attracted £66 million in private investment for reprocessing and recycling, diverted 1.7 million tonnes of waste from landfill, eliminated 285,000 tonnes of hazardous waste and reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 2 million tonnes.

**NISP** has also commissioned independent consultants to look at its performance. **Scott Wilson** consultants reported last year:

*"**The Programme**'s ability to contribute to the seven cross-programme comparable **BREW** metrics"—*

if hon. Members will excuse the language—

*"puts **NISP** at the forefront of delivering the economic and environmental benefits to the UK and exceeds any similarly **BREW** funded programme."*

Thus **NISP** is probably the most effective part of the overall **BREW** programme.

The waste and resources action programme, which has been mentioned, is a little more difficult to evaluate. It makes great claims about recycling capacity, including the claim that an additional 9.9 million people in England are now committed recyclers. It also claims £182 million of investment levered into the recycling sector from commercial sources and increased industry turnover in the recycling sector of £1.3 billion. Of course, it is not entirely clear how much of that is due to **WRAP** alone

and how much to other factors, but it has done some very specific work with the **Olympic Delivery Authority**, Sheffield city council schools projects and elsewhere with demonstrable benefit.

In a spirit of cross-party co-operation, I shall quote Conservative-controlled Gloucestershire county council, which credits WRAP with helping it to increase recycling in Gloucestershire by 9 per cent. over the past two years from 21 to 30 per cent. with the help of £467,000 of funding in awareness-raising and public engagement activities. In a less cross-party spirit, the increase might have been a little higher, if Cheltenham borough council had not fallen into the hands of the **Conservatives** a few years ago, because although the Liberal administration, having inherited a domestic recycling rate of 9 per cent. from an earlier **Tory** administration, nearly tripled the rate to 26 per cent., two years after the Tories regained control, sadly, no new kerbside recycling has been added to the **Liberal Democrat** initiatives on paper, tins, bottles and green waste, and the percentage has risen to only 28 per cent.

In fairness, however, even to the Conservative-controlled administration, there is a general problem in Gloucestershire in co-ordinating the best response locally between different councils, which **Mr. Illsley** has mentioned in a different context. The issue is about ensuring a high quality, cost-effective and co-ordinated recycling response across different areas. The **Minister** perhaps needs to consider how to assist local councils to bring together effective waste partnerships that move forward, because there seem to be barriers.

The statistics highlight the variation between different businesses and local authorities. Real political will is required to drive the issue forward, so it is alarming that WRAP is meeting the Secretary for State today, according to reports, to discuss budget cuts of 25 per cent. or more, and it has already made 31 staff redundant. NISP is also concerned. It has expressed the fear that overall funding for the BREW programme, from which it gets its funding, could drop precipitately from £125 million per annum to as little as £60 million.

I asked the **Minister** about that in a written question on 7 January, to which she gave the rather cryptic answer that

*"future spending...will be carefully balanced with other departmental priorities".—[Hansard, 7 January 2008; Vol. 470, c. 68W.]*

I assumed that that meant that the **Minister** simply did not know about the issue at the time, but in the light of the meetings that are taking place today—the **Secretary of State** must have been briefed on the situation—perhaps she will clarify the funding situation for WRAP, NISP and the BREW programme as whole, because I am sure that the figures exist.

Where has the sharp downturn in funding come from? It was not flagged up in last year's waste strategy, which mentioned continuing support for the BREW programme, and it was not flagged up in the **DEFRA** annual report. DEFRA has a £3 billion budget, but it is difficult to spot any specific plans for BREW organisations in the report, which does not include specific projections on landfill tax revenue. There was a clue in the Budget in March last year, which said that there would be an increase in landfill tax revenue. **The Budget** included lots of bold environmental claims, and it gave the impression that everything in the garden was rosy in relation to Government support for environmental initiatives. Nowhere was the crisis in funding anticipated, and the sector was not prepared for it, so where has it come from?

An article that appeared in **The Guardian** seems to answer the question. It said that there was potentially a £1 billion hole in the DEFRA budget over three years and that DEFRA and its agencies

*"failed to find sufficient savings to meet a £300m shortfall from April. The ministry is still more than £100m short despite cuts",*

including those that are planned within the BREW programme. The reason is not difficult to find, and there are some reasonable excuses. The **EU** single farm payments have been more expensive than expected, and DEFRA had to set up contingency funds to cover the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, bluetongue and avian flu. Those things were obviously necessary, but why can the Government as a whole not provide contingencies for such unexpected developments?

There is a parallel with the crisis in the **NHS** two years ago, when it was decided that deficits had reached a critical point and had to be cleared within one year. For some reason, that unexpected development had to be funded from within the **Department of Health**, and there was no possibility of transferring funds from other Departments. There seems to be a complete lack of joined-up government and contingency planning for unexpected developments. Perhaps that reflects a view in the rest of

Government that waste recycling is an optional extra and a bit of a luxury, which translates into a lack of ambition in DEFRA.

That might be unfair. Last year, the waste strategy had much to commend it, but it also had many gaps. Most dramatically, reduction, as has been highlighted by my hon. Friend **Dr. Pugh**, which is absolutely at the top of the waste hierarchy, was left out. We need not only to recycle more, but to reduce the need to recycle. The waste strategy promised a progress report in spring 2008 on actions and target solutions to reduce the impacts of products across their lifetime. Thanks to global warming, spring will reach us earlier than expected this year, so perhaps the **Minister** will tell us that the report is imminent or when it is due. Perhaps she will even tell us what will be announced in the report.

I suggest that the report should contain a few measures to tackle the producers and manufacturers of packaging and some of the packaging waste that we see in our waste bins every week. Why not attack some hard-to-recycle materials to reflect the cost of carbon at manufacturing level? Why not introduce a tax on plastic bags, perhaps learning from the Irish example and the risks associated with that approach? There are plenty of examples around the world of economies that exist without so much plastic bag packaging, including the United States of America, where paper bags are much more the norm. Frankly, if **George Bush's** America can manage that, I do not see why we should not be able to shift in that direction. To give them credit, retailers such as Tesco seem to appreciate the problem and try to reduce the billions of plastic bags that they use.

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 6 February 2008, c278WH)

**Eric Illsley** (Barnsley Central, Labour)

I do not think that the United States' record under **George Bush** on climate change is the best that the hon. Gentleman could have selected. If one looks at the carbon footprint and energy used in the production and transportation of paper bags, one sees that they exceed those of plastic carrier bags. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but we must find a way to reduce the amount of plastic or the number of carrier bags, but in doing so we must not end up affecting climate change in another way.

- [Link to this](#)
- [Hansard source](#) (Citation: HC Deb, 6 February 2008, c281WH)

**Martin Horwood** (Shadow Minister (Environment), Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; Cheltenham, Liberal Democrat)

The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. The matter is not only

is difficult even for politicians to generalise. To summarise the main issues that came out of the interesting speeches from the hon. Members for Norwich, North, for Southport (Dr. Pugh) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), and **Mr. Smith**, we need the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to do more. There is a clear requirement for leadership. Progress has been made, but, across the board, we are not moving at a sufficient rate, and there is no strong line from **DEFRA**, to quote the hon. Member for Southport, to pull all the different threads together. We need that and a real sense of vision and leadership at the centre.

Weighed against that is the fact that local communities must be able to forge their own solutions that are right for them in their part of the country. However, that does not negate the need for a compelling and ambitious vision at the centre.

As has already been pointed out, rather than work on an ambitious vision and providing that leadership, DEFRA is not meeting urgently today to hammer out a plan to tackle our nation's waste, yet it has prime responsibility not only for waste but for the whole climate change agenda, which we all agree to be the most pressing and important problem facing humankind in the 21st century.

Today, the **Secretary of State** has convened a crisis meeting to address chronic mismanagement and overspending in a Department that, from media reports, appears to be falling apart. Despite making cuts of almost £200 million since April last year, DEFRA needs to cut a further £100 million from its budget in the coming weeks. That is not a sign of a Department rising to the huge challenges that clearly face it. Given the growing awareness of climate change, it is extraordinary that the Department should be trying to cut its cloth in that way, but in many ways the fault lies within.

We should not be allowed to believe that the **majority** of last year's cost overruns were simply the result of unavoidable acts of God such as flooding, or bird flu. Much of the overspend was avoidable; it was the direct result of Government mismanagement. We learned this week that the waste and recycling sectors will bear the brunt of much of that DEFRA incompetence.

For instance, the business resource and efficiency waste partnership has already been mentioned. It seems likely that its spending will be cut by more than half, despite the fact that it has been responsible for more than 2 million tonnes of landfill diversion, 1.8 million tonnes of **CO2**

reduction and cost savings of £40 million last year. **WRAP**, which promotes recycling measures to reduce the use of landfill, confirms that its funding is to be cut by 25 per cent. Indeed, this week it issued more than 30 compulsory redundancies.

That is not the work of a Department that is in charge of its agenda and forging ahead. It is the work of a Department in retreat and in disarray. Although the Government are making much of their international leadership on climate change, they are undermining some of our most effective and efficient emissions reduction programmes.

Across the waste agenda, the Government are getting things wrong, and the results are plain to see. For example, the number of recorded incidents of fly-tipping has increased by 290 per cent. over the past two years. **The United Kingdom** has one of the highest levels of landfill in the **EU**, and 22 per cent. of our methane emissions, a gas that has 23 times the greenhouse effect of CO<sub>2</sub>, is emitted from decomposing landfill. Why is more of that pollutant not being trapped and used for energy generation? It is not good enough to make the renewables obligation available for methane. Companies that are polluting in that diabolical way should not be rewarded with renewables obligations. They should be penalised for allowing those gases to escape.

Thus we see that the climate change agenda is becoming ever more closely wedded to the waste agenda. It is increasingly clear, in part due to the good work being done by DEFRA and the **Minister** to raise public awareness about climate change, that the British people not only care about climate change and want to feel informed about it, but want Ministers to take action.

It is clear that people care about the environmental impact of their lifestyle, which means that they want to produce less waste and recycle more. It is appalling that 20 tonnes of waste are produced for each tonne of consumer goods sold in Britain. However, we have seen a gradual but steady improvement in domestic attitudes to recycling and composting. I believe that people are trying to make a positive change in the teeth of often unhelpful and certainly indecisive Government policies

We rightly worry about waste because of its impact on the immediate environment, the global environment and climate-changing emissions. However, that increasingly obscures another issue—that of the unsustainable and inefficient use of resources in the first place. We must start seeing waste not as a problem to be solved only at the end of the

pipeline, but as one that needs to be dealt with much farther upstream. The life-cycle of raw materials and products, how we design, make and use the consumables that we enjoy and how we dispose of them need to be addressed.

We need to take a far more holistic view of waste. That means reducing the amount of waste that we generate. We should be looking for ways to reduce packaging and to tackle poor product design so that product life spans dramatically increase and recyclability is enhanced. The reuse of waste is also vital. Useful and valuable items, such as building materials, furniture, white goods and computers should be taken out of the waste stream and reused. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Oxford, East raised the issue of Government action to prevent the incineration of recyclable materials, and I would be interested to hear what the **Minister** has to say in response. He certainly hit on an important thread.

I give a topical example of how an enlightened approach to waste can deliver a cost-effective and easy win. **The London** fire brigade is moving its headquarters to new offices in Southwark. Faced with the challenge of what to do with 6,000 items of furniture, weighing over 300 tonnes, which had to be removed from its old offices on the Albert embankment, the brigade developed a sustainable waste strategy that resulted in 69 per cent. of its furniture being reused, 27 per cent. being recycled and 4 per cent. being used for waste to energy—and 0 per cent. being sent to landfill or incinerated. That resulted in the brigade making savings of about £100,000, which illustrates the fact that saving on waste can mean financial savings—in this case, money that will be better spent helping the fire brigade to protect people and the city that it serves.

Most important, however, we must convince business and local government to see all waste as a potential raw material in an increasingly resource-scarce world. We should be providing a framework in which innovators, entrepreneurs and companies can find ways to convert waste into new and valuable commodities. The economics of recycling are clear. If we simply meet European directive objectives, we will need to treble the recycling and composting of waste. That raw material is estimated to have a market value of £590 million a year to the **UK** economy if it is recovered from the waste stream. We want the Government not to dither, but to start providing clear leadership.

Local empowerment and public consent are the key, as is the empowerment of business. The Conservative party appreciates the huge

part that the market, industry and technology have to play in revolutionising the waste sector. The Government will solve our waste recycling problems—in tandem with the private sector, entrepreneurs and industry—only if they set out long-term policies to give business and local authorities the confidence to take new approaches and to make long-term investments.

Waste companies should be recognised as innovative businesses that create useful and valuable products out of waste. Regulations should be streamlined to reflect the changing attitudes to waste. For example, as soon as the regulations on waste management handling were changed under the waste management licence, industrial composting grew by between 40 and 50 per cent. The waste industry should not be restricted by the cumbersome over-regulation of waste disposal that does not recognise the value added by the industry. We need a clear, long-term objective.

Why cannot the Government see waste recycling as an opportunity to make Britain safer and greener, and an opportunity to generate new wealth and economic health for Britain in the process? We all need to recognise the opportunity to find profit and growth where previously we saw only waste and rubbish. In an increasingly resource-scarce world, where climate change is the overwhelming imperative, we desperately need DEFRA to get a grip on itself, and to provide the leadership that we all deserve.

**Joan Ruddock** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Lewisham, Deptford, Labour)

I have only a few minutes to answer all the questions posed by the six Members who spoke, so I shall write to any whose questions I do not answer.

I congratulate my hon. Friend **Dr. Gibson** on securing this debate and for the great enthusiasm with which he presented his case. If one becomes a keen recycler, I know that one really wants to do more. Many of the points raised by right hon. and hon. Members will be extremely helpful to the Government, and I shall take account of all that has been said—although perhaps not the criticism of our waste strategy made by **Gregory Barker**. I can tell him that our waste strategy for 2007 was enormously and enthusiastically received by all who were consulted. Indeed, it is moving on the way in which we deal with waste at a tremendous pace.

As we know, each year, we generate about 100 million tonnes of waste from households, commerce and industry. Most of that waste ends up in landfill, where the biodegradable part of it causes emissions of methane, which, as others have said, is a potent greenhouse gas. However, the overall waste is greater than that amount; there is also the absolute waste of those raw materials and, of course, the valuable energy that has been used in extracting, processing and making goods.

Therefore, when we published our waste strategy 2007 document, we put that strategy firmly in the context of climate change. Reducing waste is part of the contribution that we must make in our great mission to hold back dangerous climate change. Our aim must be to reduce waste by making products with fewer natural resources and therefore break the link between economic growth and waste growth.

Therefore, minimising waste is even more important than recycling itself and it is the next step that we all need to take in tackling waste. To that end, **DEFRA** has adopted a challenging new target of reducing our residual waste per person to half what it was in 2000 by 2020.

I am glad to say that residual waste has decreased and less waste is going to landfill. However, there is still a very wide gap between the best and worst performing authorities. The lowest percentage of municipal waste landfill in 2006-07 was just 7 per cent., but the highest was 93 per cent. The gap between those figures demonstrates what the challenge is. Let me turn now to Norwich. Its recycling rate, according to the latest statistics that I have for 2006-07, was just 18 per cent. As the overall rate in England for that year was 31 per cent., I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North that Norwich was not one of the best performers. However, what is important is that that figure of 18 per cent. represents an increase of 3 per cent. Furthermore, from what my hon. Friend has said today, the most recent figures for Norwich, which of course have not yet been validated by the Department, will show a further increase in that rate. So I congratulate the local authority in Norwich on that and I am delighted to say that the way in which it is progressing, with alternate weekly collections and collections of new streams of waste, is very important indeed. I say that because we know that, of the highest performing councils on recycling in the country, the vast **majority** collect residual waste one week and recyclable waste the following week.

**Ian Gibson** (Norwich North, Labour)

rose—

**Joan Ruddock** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Lewisham, Deptford, Labour)

I will not have time to address the other questions if my hon. Friend intervenes now. Let me just say that the local authority in Norwich is making the right type of progress and taking the right kinds of action, and we are very appreciative of that work.

It was suggested earlier that there was a financial pressure coming from the centre to get councils to adopt alternative weekly collections, which I think should not be called "alternate weekly collections" because the councils collect every week; they just collect different things each week. There is not financial pressure from the centre; instead, there is a sensible desire for business efficiency on the part of the councils themselves. Clearly, if the councils have less residual waste to take to landfill, they will save on the costs of landfill. That is why that efficiency drive makes a great deal of sense. I am also delighted to learn about the Costessey plant, which I understand will turn food and garden waste into compost.

Let me now answer some of the questions that were put to me. A number of hon. Members raised questions about plastic bags. I can tell them that the desire of the Government is to end the free giveaway of the single-use bag. We do not believe that a tax is likely to be the best way forward. We are consulting; we have a forum coming up with all the retailers, in order to have a further discussion with them. The progress that has been made to date, which people may have noticed and commented on, has been made as a result of the Courtauld commitment, whereby we have reached an agreement with 92 per cent. of the grocery chain to reduce the environmental impact of those plastic bags.

Paper is not a substitute for plastic, and my hon. Friend **Mr. Illsley** explained why that is the case. It is the single use of the bag that is the problem. It is symptomatic of a throwaway society and we must end that practice.

A number of right hon. and hon. Members raised issues about **BREW**, **WRAP** and **NISP**. I am not in a position to tell them this afternoon the final outcomes of our discussions on finance. However, I would say that, just because particular work is done at a particular time does not mean that that particular work should continue. These programmes have been about innovation, encouraging businesses to adopt new practices and

bringing businesses together. Therefore, much of that work has set a pattern and it is more than reasonable that business itself begins to engage in that pattern. People should not believe that, because, for example, WRAP has had to issue notices, all that change will necessarily come to fruition. Decisions have not yet been taken, and it is reasonable that we have had conversations with our delivery bodies.

I was asked about the recycling of plastic. It was suggested that there was a lack of co-operation by retailers. The landfill tax escalator is the tool that the Government are using to persuade commerce and industry that they should divert waste from landfill. The serious increases in price will mean that commerce and industry will be driven into carrying out more recycling and we are working with them on recycling plastics in particular.

I was asked about Government support for local recycling. Again, I would like to refer to the situation in Norwich and in Norfolk, because I obtained the figures for that area for this particular debate. In 2006-07, more than £1.5 million of Government funding went to that area to help to raise the performance on recycling and composting. In the current financial year, which will end soon, the same amount—more than £1.5 million—was again given to the area to promote that work. That is the type of support that the Government give. Sometimes, that support is given directly and at other times it is given through WRAP. That support has been given through the waste performance efficiency grants.

My right hon. Friend **Mr. Smith** asked about a number of issues relating to commercial and industrial waste, including a ban on the incineration of products and materials that could be recycled. In the waste strategy 2007 document, we said that we would consider such a ban. We would expect aluminium to be collected separately, and indeed we are talking with industry about the streams of metal waste in particular.

Briefly, I would like to return to the household sector. We are enabling people to recycle more easily. We are providing powers in the **Climate Change Bill** for five pilot projects, so that local authorities can examine incentives for reducing waste, and the rate for the national recycling of waste, as set out in the waste strategy 2007 document, will rise to 40 per cent. by 2010, to 45 per cent. by 2015 and to 50 per cent. by 2020. Although achieving those increases is incredibly challenging, we believe that we are on target and that we will reach the first of those major objectives by 2010.

We are also recycling new streams of waste. Earlier, right hon. and hon. Members referred to electrical and electronic equipment. Through the waste electrical and electronic equipment, or **WEEE**, directive, we are dealing with that issue and it is important that we do so, because **UK** households are throwing away around 1 million tonnes of that type of waste every year.

With WRAP, we have launched a programme to deal with food waste. We aim to achieve a reduction of 100,000 tonnes of food waste by March this year. As a society, we are throwing away a third of all the food that we purchase, so food waste reduction is an important new area for waste reduction.

The waste strategy 2007 document will encourage local authorities to collect different types of waste separately, including food waste. In particular, we are putting money into encouraging the use of anaerobic digestion, so that we can have a win-win situation whereby we take away the food and green waste, put it into a digester and then it can, I hope, be used both in agriculture and to produce energy. Furthermore, batteries are the latest product on which we are consulting, because each household is throwing away an average of 21 portable batteries every year.

In conclusion, we are placing a greater responsibility on businesses for the environmental impact of their products and operations. We are placing a strong emphasis on waste prevention, with householders reducing their waste, for example, through home composting and use of food waste, and we are encouraging business to help consumers, for example, by using less packaging. Packaging recycling has doubled over the past 10 years. People perhaps do not realise that industry is ahead of the householder in that regard and much more progress has been made in the industrial sector. Finally, we are issuing a challenge to see recycling extended outside the home and office and taken into public places, such as shopping malls.

23. **Andrew Smith** (Oxford East, Labour) 1 Feb 2008

To ask the **Secretary of State** for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

*(1) whether he plans to consult local authorities on the implications for incineration waste disposal costs of reclassification of bottom ash as hazardous waste;*

*(2) what considerations he has given to the merits of reclassifying bottom ash from incinerators as hazardous waste;*

*(3) what discussions his Department has held with other **EU** governments on the classification of bottom ash waste from incinerators.*

- **Hansard source** (Citation: HC Deb, 1 February 2008, c707W)  
**Joan Ruddock** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Lewisham, Deptford, Labour)  
holding answer 29 January 2008  
Revisions to the approved supply list (**ASL**) (version 8) introduced an ecotoxic classification for zinc oxide, one of the substances which is likely to be present in incinerator bottom ash (**IBA**). Zinc substances now need to be considered, in addition to lead and other ecotoxic heavy metals, when classifying and disposing of this kind of waste.  
Since there is the potential for potentially ecotoxic metal substances in incinerator bottom ash (IBA) to exist in non-ecotoxic form, I understand that the waste industry is currently developing a protocol for ecotoxicity testing of IBA.  
**DEFRA** and the **Environment Agency** both consider that the classification of IBA will remain non-hazardous pending the results of direct testing, which is being carried out as part of this work.  
DEFRA has not discussed the classification of IBA with other member states.