

## Biffa Municipal press release

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### **JUDICIAL REVIEW COULD SET BRITISH RECYCLING BACK YEARS, WARNS BIFFA**

A leading waste management company has warned that millions of Britons may be forced to physically separate their recycling into different containers, and so cost local authorities millions of pounds, if a judicial review rules against the Government's definition of recycling.

According to Pete Dickson, development director of Biffa's municipal division, the recent approval of a judicial review application by the Campaign for Real Recycling (CRR) 'could set back British recycling years, confuse householders, and undermine the very real recycling achievements made by many councils'.

The CRR claims that Defra is wrong to say that commingled recycling collections, where dry materials such as paper, card, glass, cans and plastics are collected mixed together, meet the revised European Waste Framework Directive's requirement that waste streams are collected separately.

The campaign organisation says the correct interpretation is that each and every material has to be collected separately, such as through kerbside-sort collections.

#### **'Blinkered self-interest'**

"The blinkered self-interest of the CRR will have its day in court, as is its right," said Dickson. "Biffa, for one, will be providing substantial input to the Environmental Services Association's expert evidence being prepared in support of Defra's interpretation.

"But if the court rules in CRR's favour, many scores of councils may be faced with scrapping their commingled recycling schemes and spending an unnecessary fortune on implementing kerbside-separated collections, as well as dealing with increased disposal costs."

According to Dickson, that could mean millions of householders having to cope with a more complex way of recycling, rather than continuing with the simple option provided by commingling.

In his opinion, this is neither the time nor the place to waste hard-pressed public money by changing an accepted and successful way of recycling.

#### **Commingling proven**

Dickson said that around half of all local authorities in England now use commingled recycling collections because they are proven to boost recycling rates. Rather than having a number of different boxes or sacks into which householders have to collect each material, commingling means they can just put everything into one container.

He added that commingling also offers a number of operating efficiencies for local authorities, such as fewer vehicle movements, fewer collections rounds and containers, and a safer working environment for collection crews, as well as achieving higher recycling rates.

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A central CRR argument is that commingling results in the creation of lower quality recycled materials that are not fit for use by re-processors. On the subject of recyclate quality, Dickson commented: “Biffa produces high quality recycled products that are in demand by both domestic and overseas re-processors, and that achieve market leading prices.”

Stating that Biffa is both a seller and purchaser of recycled commodities that have been collected by both commingled and kerbside-sort systems, he said that Biffa achieves the same market prices for these commodities, irrespective of the original collection system.

Dickson commented: “What matters is not the collection system, but how you manage your processes to ensure you meet the quality specifications of your re-processor partners.”

He said the fact that long-established re-processors were now investing in new MRFs could be taken as evidence that the CRR’s stance did not have widespread support amongst UK-based recyclable re-processors.

### **Not opposed to kerbside-sort**

He emphasised: “Let’s be absolutely clear. We do not oppose kerbside-sort recycling. It is a viable and useful collection system that must and should be an option available to local authorities. It’s just that kerbside-sort is not right for many local authorities, whereas commingling is.

“Councils must have the freedom to choose the collection system that is right for their local needs, budgets, geographies and residents, be it commingling or kerbside-sort. The CRR apparently wants to take away that freedom.”

In Biffa’s view, the purpose of the European Directive was to ensure that local authorities provided comprehensive recycling services to enable maximum waste diversion and recycling.

“Unlike the CRR, the Directive is not trying to dictate how recyclates are collected,” said Dickson. “It certainly would not intend to rule out a collection system that produces the highest diversion rates and produces quality recyclate.”

### **Top council commingles**

A recent study by industry website letsrecycle found that South Oxfordshire District Council, where Biffa helped launch a new refuse collection and commingled recycling service in 2009, is likely to be the top English council in 2010-11 with a recycling, reuse and composting rate of 70%. This is the first time a local authority has achieved this milestone.

Earlier this year, Surrey Heath Borough Council, which was third in the letsrecycle table, won the local authority target success category of the National Recycling Awards after it beat its 60% target rate 15 years early, thanks to a new refuse and commingled recycling service rolled out by Biffa.

Dickson commented that ‘it can’t just be coincidence’ that none of the top ten authorities identified in the letsrecycle study use kerbside-sort collections for dry recyclables.

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**Notes to editors:**

The municipal division of recycling, waste and renewable energy business Biffa ([www.biffa.co.uk](http://www.biffa.co.uk)) currently provides high quality, efficient recycling, refuse, street cleansing and grounds maintenance services for over 40 local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland. The division expanded considerably in late 2010 when municipal services specialist Verdant Group, and its 24 local authority contracts, joined Biffa when Greenstar UK was acquired. The municipal business makes over 2½ million collections per week, and employs in excess of 2,500 staff who use over 1,000 vehicles. Its notable successes include helping South Oxfordshire District Council achieve a recycling and composting rate of 70% during 2010, placing the council second in Defra's 2009-2010 league tables for overall recycling, composting and reuse and winning a LARAC Award for the most improved recycling authority. The first months of Vale of White Horse District Council's new service saw its recycling and composting rate match that of its South Oxfordshire neighbour, while a redesigned service for Surrey Heath Borough Council doubled its recycling and composting rate to almost 65%, helping it meet its 2025 target almost 15 years early.