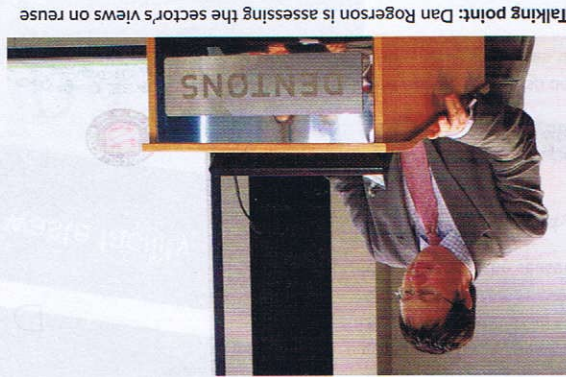


Climbing out of the 'waste' mindset

Resource management minister Dan Rogerson attended a conference in London during the consultation on reuse and repair. Organiser Andrea Pellegram looks at the key conclusions



Talking point: Dan Rogerson is assessing the sector's views on reuse

There is a thriving reuse sector in the UK already: the charitable and voluntary sector has been taking donations for decades. Donated materials are not 'waste'; Household waste recycling centres (HWRCS) are full of reusable materials. However, unlike donated materials, these are 'waste' and subject to all the regulation of 'waste materials'; Reusable items in HWRCS are recycled and in this process rendered almost valueless.

It is time to shift the discourse towards resources; HWRCS should be rebranded as 'community resource centres' where reuse and recycling coexist.

The definition of waste

The definition of waste should be refined so it does not rely as heavily on the intent of the current owner and more on the intrinsic use value of an item. Reusable materials should not be classified as waste. To achieve this within the current regulatory framework, permitting and exemptions need to be developed.

Exemptions

Clear exemptions are required to improve reuse performance. HWRC and other licensed facilities should be enabled to have 'reuse areas' where reusable material can be segregated and not be subject to the regulations, particularly duty of care. Specific exemptions around materials might also be appropriate where there is little environmental risk but significant reuse potential. Tonnage exemptions are another means

A PLAN IN THE MAKING

CONSULTATION

Defra is currently assessing sector views on where the definition of waste has acted as a barrier to reuse and repair activities. The deadline for responses to a consultation was 30 January and Defra intends to develop an action plan with trial approaches in different sectors.

of excluding small quantities of reusable items from the waste stream.

Guidance

Guidance is required on how to apply the regulations and exemptions to reuse schemes, particularly those that seek to divert material from HWRCS and other permitted operations. The Environment Agency should work with stakeholders to show how to identify and manage reusable materials within the regulations and this advice should make this widely available.

Standards

Guidance should be in the form of standards to begin to manage the quality of materials. Standards should be developed to help waste management staff take a more systematic and professional approach towards identification of reusable materials.

Communications

There is currently poor public understanding of what is subject to the waste regulations and the difference between 'recycling' and 'reuse'. An information campaign is required that promotes the wide benefits of reuse.

Local government commissioning should take greater account of the benefits of the Social Value Act and consider

the cross-departmental opportunities that reuse schemes offer. Waste contracts should facilitate reuse.

Maximising funding opportunities

Start-up funding for reuse schemes should be made available through the landfill community tax fund by creating a new landfill community fund object for reuse schemes (ENTRUST).

Metrics

Reuse should be set out separately from recycling and composting in national and local government monitoring. Metrics should seek to reflect improvement in non-waste benefits (social value) by introducing new targets for 'soft outcomes' such as volunteer hours, job creation, NEFT placements, etc.

Facilitating partnership working

A national network of reuse stakeholders should be established to help create shared values, objectives and working practices between the three sectors (private, public, third).

Professionalism

The reuse sector should be professionalised by the creation of standards, training programmes for HWRCS and other operational staff on how to identify materials suitable for repair and reuse.

The waste hierarchy

The responsibility to consider the waste hierarchy should be shifted to the producer/owner. This will encourage owners to divert to reuse where possible.

Manufacturers

Manufacturers need to consider reuse when they design products and reconcile their concerns about warranties and the risk to their reputations arising from reuse.