

Environmental Agency consultation for the revision of standard rules permits for biowaste treatment and plastics contamination

The Environmental Permitting Regulations from 2016 (for Wales and England) are a set of rules allowing the Environment Agency (EA) to offer standard permits to businesses and facilities processing biowaste in a way that reduces administrative burden while upholding environmental standards. The EA is proposing revisions to these rules to improve industrial performance while keeping up to date with the government's environmental objectives, to improve soil health, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, the revisions also reflect the EA wish to take more of an active part in the bioeconomy, notably by promoting anaerobic digestion (AD).

Earlier this month the EA published data from a consultation it ran in 2020 to gather views on the proposed revisions with stakeholders including public bodies, environmental organisations and individuals. It appeared that the majority of the 45 participants disagreed with the revisions overall. More particularly, concerning the revisions of plastic contamination regulations, 16 out of 25 participants disagreed with the proposed 0.5% w/w (weight per weight) limit on non-biodegradable plastic in incoming waste. Six other participants agreed and three neither agreed nor disagreed. The participants who had disagreed detailed the challenges they would face should these amendments be applied, including the hardship of competing for contracts which forces them to accept contaminated waste; the financial pressure that "cleaning up" the waste would cause, leading to negative compost and digestate prices; the difficult process of sorting biodegradable from non-biodegradable plastics; and the fact that restrictions do not include microplastics pollution. They also proposed a descending target, suggesting a 1.5% w/w target for 2021 and a 0.5% w/w target for 2023.

Through their response to these comments, the EA reaffirmed its strong desire to reduce plastic pollution, citing its impact on human health and the environment, and the current 5.5% w/w household waste contamination rate, which the EA has deemed unacceptable. Having discussed the issues raised by the participants with collaborating institutions and stakeholders, the Agency has decided to take a different approach, starting with waste collections. Over the next 5 years, the EA proposes that waste treatment facilities implement pre-acceptance and acceptance procedures to ensure minimal contamination before treatment begins. There will also be a year on year reduction in non-biodegradable plastic contamination received from kerbside collections. Furthermore, operators wishing to take on contaminated waste will need to demonstrate adequate pre-treatment procedures to ensure contamination is kept to a minimum. Finally, targeting more upstream processes, the EA will work with stakeholders and other governmental bodies to reduce single-use non compostable plastics.

A complete account of the Consultation, along with the Environment Agency response can be found online. Please follow this [link](#) for more information.