



Plastics Recycling – Isles

Here are a number of reasons as to why Orkney Islands Council (OIC) doesn't support the collection of communal plastic recycling skips on the outer isles at the moment. This document was put together by the Waste Team in the Council to help residents better understand this position and particularly in light of the pressure placed upon the council by residents since Blue Planet II and the general groundswell of public support on plastics generally.

Cost

It costs approximately £573 every time OIC services a skip. There are 13 non-linked isles and if the Council give to one isle they have to give to all. Then there is the cost also of processing the waste and recycling at Chinglebraes (the council's waste transfer station) and of course shipping costs south. There will also be a 'gate fee' that all private and public-sector authorities pay to an organisation who is licenced to accept waste/recyclate materials.

Markets for recyclates – particularly single use type plastic

Markets have collapsed owing to China ban; there is now nowhere to send it. 67% of UK plastic was going to China (not Orkney's) so there is insufficient infrastructure at present within the UK to accept single use plastic. This then has a knock-on effect with respect to other types of plastic, as the number of reprocessors who do accept plastic are 'squeezed'/inundated with private and public-sector waste authorities wanting to send plastic to them. The market price is very low at the moment (year ending December 2018) and OIC currently gets zero rebate on plastic at present. Orkney is lucky in that it has a source segregated recycling scheme in place, which means its household bottles are cleaner, and also it isn't mixed up with other types of plastic. Therefore, to date, Orkney continues to successfully ship it's collected plastic to reprocessors within Europe if not the UK.

Shetland – EFW plant

The waste required to ensure the greatest operating efficient at the Gremista Plant on Shetland is made up of 60% Shetland's residual waste sent for final treatment and 40% is Orkney's residual waste. The more waste that Orkney chooses to remove from this 40% quota, eventually this will affect the plants operating capability which results in Shetland having to import additional waste materials from say mainland Scotland. The costs of importing this waste has a knock-on effect to Orkney in that it would be highly likely Shetland would put up its gate fee they charge Orkney, resulting in increased costs to OIC (gate fees). These costs are then passed

on down the supply chain ultimately to Orkney's trade waste customers, or at least in part. To note also that plastic has a very high calorific value.

Contamination

In general, communal recycling facilities are not favoured. They can cause real headaches for local authorities. Communal recycling leads to increased contamination and contamination means higher costs in terms of separating out the contaminants, or indeed losing an entire load or skip to the general refuse because it is highly contaminated. Plastics in particular are very easy to contaminate because there are several types, and this leads to confusion as to what can and cannot be recycled. Even with good education and lots of information out there via the web, Facebook, radio, newspaper, folk still get it wrong. It's just human nature!

Outer isles are of course on communal recycling facilities. So easy to contaminate as there are so many different types of plastic (7 types at least) and through either "unintentional ignorance" or "intentional laziness". Communal facilities can be abused. In addition, communal recycling facilities are often less favoured by local authorities especially when just left out on a limb, because it is very easy for folk to put in highly dangerous materials termed hazardous materials. These can comprise (and this happened in Orkney in 2018) undetonated marine flares, calor camping gas containers etc, syringes, batteries etc.

Viridor, a private sector company, once had a large camping calor gas container turn up at its reprocessing facility in Perth. The calor gas container was inside a white goods item (tumble dryer or the like). It was not detected through its sorting line and exploded causing a fire and many staff to be hospitalised. On that occasion there were no fatalities, but it could easily have been the outcome. The knock-on effect affected the whole country because the plant had to close down temporarily and therefore one of the main UK's reprocessors to receive white goods was on shut down for a number of months. White goods piled up in their store yards, and no doubt local authorities were told to hang onto them in their yards too...

So communal facilities are not favoured because of the health and safety risk to both business and human life. The knock-on effect of hazardous materials coming into Orkney's waste transfer station would be quite catastrophic, as if that shut down, even temporarily, there are no other means by which to bale Orkney's residual waste or recyclates and prepare them for shipping. The investment in an alternative even temporary would be hundreds of thousands of pounds if not millions.

We hope this provides you with a fuller understanding as to why the Council doesn't support plastic recycling separation in the general community at the moment.