

Less than eight years of landfill space left, warn council leaders

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Britain will run out of landfill space in less than eight years' time unless recycling rates are boosted and the amount of rubbish dumped in the ground is reduced, council leaders have warned.

The warning comes as figures reveal that Britain is still officially the 'dustbin of Europe' dumping more household waste into the ground than any other country.

Analysis by the Local Government Association, which comes as it holds its annual conference in Bournemouth, shows households in the UK send more than 18.8million tonnes of rubbish to landfill every year – 2 million more tonnes than any other country in the European Union.

The countries which send the largest amount of household rubbish to landfill each year are:

- The UK – which dumps around 19million tonnes
- Italy – which dumps around 16million tonnes
- Spain – which dumps around 15million tonnes
- France – which dumps around 12million tonnes

A total of 57 million tonnes of waste were sent to landfill in England and Wales in 2008. With just 650 million cubic metres left in landfill capacity – the equivalent of three times the volume of Lake Windermere – Britain is set to reach its landfill limit by 2018.

Local government leaders also warn that unless radical reforms are made to the amount of waste we produce and to the way we dispose of it, taxpayers will be hit hard in the pocket. Householders, shops, businesses and manufacturers all have a vital role to play in protecting the environment and in cutting the amount of rubbish that is produced and thrown away.

On 1 April, landfill tax paid by councils rose to £48 per tonne. This will increase by £8 per tonne each year to 2014/15. By 2020, the government, and consequently taxpayers, will face fines of up to £180m a year if landfill targets are not met.

Council leaders are calling on the government to ensure its waste review comes up with radical approaches to cutting the cost of dealing with the nation's rubbish at a time when council budgets are under unprecedented pressure.

Efforts by councils to encourage people to recycle have paid off with the amount of waste sent to landfill falling by 33% since 2000. For example, Cambridgeshire County Council has already met its landfill targets for 2013 and 2020. Bexley Council has exceeded its 2010 target of reducing waste to landfill by 75% of 1995 levels and is well on the way to meeting its 2013 and 2020 targets.

However, local government leaders warn that more needs to be done if taxpayers are to avoid swingeing fines.

Cllr Gary Porter, Chairman of the LGA Environment Board, said:

"Householders should be congratulated for the efforts they have made in recent years to increase the amount of rubbish they recycle. But that doesn't change the fact that Britain is fast running out of space to dump rubbish in the ground.

"An area the size of Warwick is already being used to dump Britain's rubbish and unless there are radical changes in the way we produce and dispose of our waste it is estimated we will run out of landfill space in less than eight years time.

"With the current financial squeeze that all councils are facing, it is more important than ever that they work with residents to make sure as much rubbish as possible is recycled to avoid being hit by heavy fines.

"For decades people used to be able to throw away their rubbish without worrying about the environmental or financial consequences. Those days have gone. Taxpayers face huge financial penalties if targets to reduce the amount of rubbish sent to landfill are not met.

“Councils use many different techniques to make sure that as much rubbish as possible is recycled and they will continue to work with local residents to decide which approach works best for their area.”

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