

WR1204

Household Waste Prevention

Evidence Review:

L3 m7-2 (T) – Future Scope for a  
Waste Prevention Network

A report for Defra's  
Waste and Resources Evidence Programme

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## Table of Contents

1.1	Evidence reviewed	1
1.2	Topline summary of findings	1
1.3	Key findings	2
1.4	Barriers to progressing a waste prevention network	5
1.5	Opportunities for progressing a waste prevention network	6
1.6	References	6

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## L3 m7-2 (T) Future scope for a waste prevention network

This paper summarises, the future scope for a waste prevention network. The main topics covered are:

- Evidence reviewed
- Topline summary of findings
- Key findings
- Barriers to progressing a future waste prevention network
- Opportunities for progressing a future waste prevention network
- Researchers' recommendations
- References of detailed reviews

### 1.1 Evidence reviewed

This paper summarises the findings from two available evidence sources. A review commissioned by Defra WREP in 2006 to undertake a scoping study for a possible waste prevention network (this was commissioned as a separate undertaking as part of Dorset County Council et al, 2008, WR0116 project); and a review of the responses from an electronic survey with stakeholders, undertaken as part of this evidence-based review (WR1204).

### 1.2 Topline summary of findings

The key findings are that these two pieces of research provide initial evidence on stakeholder views for development of a strategy; there appears to be a lack of connectivity of existing waste prevention networks indicated by the diversity of views; and the strong support for a wide involvement of stakeholders suggests that there is a need for a wider range of skills and experience to support waste prevention.

Overall there is interest in developing a waste prevention network, however, this interest is not unanimous. Some are 'not sure' and query, for example, the added value a network could bring. A few others do not think it is necessary at all. A concern expressed by some was whether there was a genuine need for a new network and whether this could be serviced effectively by existing networks. A proportion of those who expressed interest, would like to see a network built into existing mechanisms, e.g. regional networks, LARAC, NAWDO. It is possible that there may be an element of 'self interest' related to this latter point (not necessarily related to the organisations cited here).

There is some scepticism in terms of who could run such a network, what its powers would be, how membership would be managed and determined (i.e. who would be involved), what it would exactly do, who would it inform, and who would pay for servicing the network. An effective management structure with clear terms of reference and resourcing would need to be agreed and put in place. Advocacy appears to be an important issue as is the need for independence.

There are conflicting views on what the intended purpose of a network should be. This means that deriving aims and objectives for a waste prevention network is likely to be a challenging process. The following issues have been identified:

- One school of thought is for a waste prevention network to contribute to the delivery of results such as carbon reductions and One Planet Living. However, it was questioned whether these results could be achieved faster through a new network rather than by the existing networks. This assumes that the existing waste prevention networks already contribute to these agendas.

- Another is that it should take the form of an 'alliance' to guide policy, strategy programmes and monitor protocols.
- Another is that it should be action-based, e.g. facilitate the development of implementation at local authority level and provide a coordinated message on waste prevention.
- The other extreme, is that it should only be technology-based, e.g. linking existing groups, providing news items and sharing good practice via the Internet.

There is a strong preference for localised influence rather than imposing a 'national blueprint'. However, without sufficient direction or management structure, the network would be disjointed and would have no purpose. A local process, however, could be supported nationally, e.g. via training events and news.

The remit of a potential network could be significantly broad. The responses were varied but there is consensus that the remit should be UK-wide extended to incorporate an international focus, and that it should include a wide range of stakeholders, e.g. schools, student organisations, community councils, retailers, supply chain (producers and manufacturers), local authorities, third sector and community waste sector, government, NGOs enterprises, universities, behaviour change specialists, designers, economists, etc.

Assuming that a network is established, a 'supra-network' is recommended by one source (Dorset County Council et al, 2008c, WR0116). The proposal is that this would act as an 'umbrella' network, collectively drawing on existing networks, harvesting links between the networks, providing waste prevention news, case studies, and links to further information. However, whilst there is a need for joined up thinking, the general view is that this would be too complex for waste prevention.

More recently, the CIWM has set up a new 'special interest group' to "provide an active forum for information exchange for all those parties interested in prevention, reduction, minimisation, avoidance and re-use tying in with sustainable production and consumption". SEPA in Scotland run a waste prevention network although no details were available at the time of writing on how this is run. In Northern Ireland a waste prevention forum has been proposed, but this has not started yet. These should be explored to see how lessons might be drawn from their experience and for potential links.

The extent of connectivity, experience or expertise contained between and within existing networks specifically on household waste prevention is unclear.

### 1.3 Key findings

In 2006, a scoping study was commissioned by Defra WREP to explore and gain insight into how a dedicated waste prevention network might be established. The study comprised a consultation exercise with over 40 organisations via telephone discussions and workshops (Dorset County Council et al, 2008c, WR0116). Indications of the likely context, within which services could be delivered, were provided as well as indications of resources and costs. The study was based largely on four observations:

- Waste prevention needed to be given significantly greater prominence in policy and strategy;
- Diverse and distinct expertise and skills were required to plan, implement and monitor waste prevention;
- Different behaviour change techniques were likely to be required to promote waste prevention; and
- Recycling continued to take the major share of attention and resources.

The study recommended that a 'supra-network' for waste prevention is established and that it should run in parallel with a 'waste prevention alliance' - the latter taking an active role in shaping policy, strategy, projects and monitoring protocols. In terms of the former, the waste prevention network would involve the sharing of ideas and opportunities for partnership working.

**Purpose** – The overarching aim of the proposed 'supra-network' would be "to make a significant and cost-effective contribution to sustainable waste management policy and practice in the UK through facilitating of information, understanding and expertise in waste prevention between all those with a role to play in its implementation and evaluation".

In addition to the above study, Defra WREP (as part of commissioning WR1204), asked the project team to explore further the potential for a waste prevention network. As part of an electronic engagement exercise with stakeholders, respondents were asked "Thinking about sharing best practice between stakeholders, what are your thoughts on the scope for a waste prevention network?" Out of the 99 responses, 31 definitely liked the idea, 10 were possibly interested, 20 suggested using an existing network, and 12 were either not sure or said that it was not necessary. The strongest support for a waste prevention network came from those who participated in the workshops (also conducted as part of the stakeholder engagement exercise). For example, there were suggestions for similar events, but that these should be extended to include retailers and the third sector.

A qualitative review of the overall responses to the survey suggests that a waste prevention network should aim to:

- Overcome the difference between recycling and waste prevention, e.g. by providing new marketing skills and door stepping skills;
- Help to overcome the mindset which currently focuses on recycling rates and aim to prioritise waste prevention at the top of the hierarchy;
- Provide a common direction and clear messages to promote to the public;
- Provide collaboration between recycling, waste and disposal. In other words, a waste prevention network should not work in isolation to other waste management factors.

Furthermore, the network should have powers to implement initiatives and carry out agreed plans.

**Strategy and outcomes** - the scoping study identified the following themes where the proposed waste prevention network could add value:

- A tangible policy shift with waste prevention higher up the public policy agenda;
- Auditable figures for waste prevention such as measurable decrease in unnecessary packaging, or reduction in household waste arisings;
- Cross-sectoral awareness, partnerships and co-operative approaches such as partnerships set up with manufacturers, designers and retailers;
- Agreeing standards and techniques for waste prevention, such as sound measurement techniques and protocols.

The above themes are not based on achievable measurable outcomes, nor are they perhaps fit for an 'agreed' waste prevention network focus.

**Who should run a waste prevention network?** – the scoping study recommended that the proposed network should be a distinct and separate undertaking. A number of responses (20) from the stakeholder survey (WR1204) strongly suggested that there was no need for a separate waste prevention network and that an existing network should be responsible for running it. The suggestions provided included:

- Regional initiatives underway, e.g. North East Regional Waste Awareness Initiative, Government Office Yorkshire & Humber, and the East of England Waste Prevention Network
- LARAC
- NAWDO
- LGA networks and Waste Network Chairs
- Waste Improvement Network
- WRAP
- BREW Centre for Local Authorities
- Resource Recovery Forum

WRAP has suggested that there are a number of networks looking at different aspects of waste prevention and any further development of a network should build on these.

**Funding** – In terms of funding a number of possible sources were identified. These included Defra, BREW, WRAP, the Environment Agency or Research Councils. Propositions were made for a subscription or membership fee structure as well as sponsorship from commercial organisations.

**Who should be involved?** – The recommendations in the scoping study and, where provided, from the stakeholder responses to the WR1204 survey, were unanimous in terms of extending the reach far and wide (i.e. beyond the current established networks) to include for example, social marketers, environmental economists, sociologists, designers, sector specialists, retail industry, trade bodies etc.

**Scope of the proposed network** – the scoping study proposed a UK-wide network (as mentioned previously Scotland has set up its own). Responses to the WR1204 survey revealed that a local (or possibly regional) approach was supported more than a national one. However, one suggestion was to have regional forums reporting to a national organisation and another suggested that a local process could be supported nationally, e.g. via training events and news. Clearly, there is a need to consider all levels, between local, regional and national implementation.

**Possible functions of a waste prevention network** – both the scoping study and the WR1204 survey provide ideas for possible network services and activities. The combined responses include:

- Harvest waste prevention and understanding through an information and knowledge centre to share ideas and 'best' practice within the UK and internationally (including what does and doesn't work). This could include dissemination of case studies and a regular e-mail newsletter, including access to further details as required by participants. The aims would be to find out what others are doing on waste prevention and provide an opportunity to discuss solutions to common problems and develop new ideas.
- Provide dialogue via e-mail, workshops, meetings and discussion groups. This could be managed / facilitated by expert practitioners meeting on a regular basis, ideally at regional scale. A keen interest was expressed in delivering workshops.
- An outreach programme to sectors and stakeholder groups to include an extended network such as behaviour change specialists, designers, planners and economists as well as retailers, distributors and

manufacturers. The aims would be to facilitate and develop new partnerships (including international ones) and discuss and share approaches. This would include presentations at stakeholder events, offering articles in academic journals and sector-specific publications.

- Host a dedicated website with downloadable resources, discussion forums and frequently updated news section; a library hub (linked to Wastenet) to cut down on time spent on internet searches; webinars on specific waste prevention topics; and provide contacts and support, e.g. information on local outlets such as repair, exchange facilities.
- Deliver an annual conference (e.g. along the lines of 'Beyond Recycling') to explore waste prevention and extend the reach to other sectors. This would be supported by regional events on specific subject areas relevant to household waste prevention.
- Provide consultancy services to provide action-based, practical solutions that stakeholders could work on, e.g. desk-based research synthesis and analysis based on existing knowledge, case studies, surveys and academic publications and web searches; and new research, including market research and surveys.
- Set up and host 'annual awards' to recognise exemplary practise. This could be linked to existing social marketing awards.

**Possible topics for the network to pursue** – include:

- Interventions and key messages for target audiences
- Design and delivery of a coordinated national message
- Shifting the culture of over-consumption and waste
- Effective monitoring and evaluation
- Embedding sustainable consumption
- Single use and disposable items
- Packaging and plastic (carrier) bags
- Unwanted mail and unwanted fliers
- Re-use of non-electrical household goods and furniture

## 1.4 Barriers to progressing a waste prevention network

There is no clear link between the proposed purpose of a waste prevention network to the outcomes and actions presented in Dorset County Council et al, 2008c, WR0116. Furthermore, the proposed outcomes are either not achievable or measurable. Further work is needed to question and elaborate what form these should take and to reach consensus with other stakeholders.

The suggestions for a proposed network, from the study and the survey, are extremely diverse and there are conflicting views on what the intended purpose should be, e.g. from delivering carbon outcomes to providing an Internet service. It will, therefore, be challenging to reach consensus on the strategic nature of and objectives for a proposed waste prevention network.

## 1.5 Opportunities for progressing a waste prevention network

The two pieces of research provide initial evidence on stakeholder views for the development of a strategy.

The diversity of stakeholder opinions suggests that the existing waste prevention networks are disjointed and might not be working together as effectively as they could. This presents an opportunity to draw these networks together to support the future promotion and effectiveness of household waste prevention. To build on this opportunity, there is a need to find out what the existing networks are currently doing (and proposing) on household waste prevention, and their level of experience and expertise. Research is needed to determine the current and future focus of existing networks on household waste prevention. As a practical next step, a mapping exercise would be needed on their strengths and weaknesses in relation to household waste prevention.

The strong support for a wide involvement of stakeholders suggests that there is a need for a wider range of skills and experience to support waste prevention. For example, WRAP suggests that there may be merit in bringing together different networks related to specific themes in waste prevention e.g. consumer engagement or materials-based such as food. Research is needed to identify the potential for acquiring additional knowledge and skills from other disciplines and their networks. The aim should be to look for connectivity and opportunity by establishing where there might be benefits to partnering with these organisations.

One possible way forward would be to identify a core group of representatives from waste prevention networks. These individuals would come together and form, for example, a 'steering group' to scope a format, strategy and objectives for a future waste prevention network. The aim should be for the group to set out future proposals for investment, management, structure and outcomes. The terms of reference for the group would be derived from the existing and proposed research outlined above.

## 1.6 References

- Dorset County Council, AEA, The Social Marketing Practice, Mike Read Associates and The University of Northampton (2008) Household Waste Prevention Activity in Dorset. WR0116.
- Dorset County Council, AEA, The Social Marketing Practice, Mike Read Associates and The University of Northampton (2008c) Household Waste Prevention Activity in Dorset. WR0116. Appendix 10. Waste prevention network report.

### **Basis of this report**

The material in this paper is derived from a large scale evidence review of household waste prevention conducted by Brook Lyndhurst, the Social Marketing Practice and the Resource Recovery Forum for Defra's Waste and Resources Evidence Programme.