

On 30 October the final stage of the European Landfill Directive came into force. From now on nonhazardous business waste must be pre-treated before it goes to landfill.

So what does that mean to businesses and what are waste management companies doing to assist their customers?

Every year UK businesses produce over 75 million tonnes of waste. Research conducted before 30 October indicated that around 15% of small and medium-sized businesses did no recycling at all. Clearly, this legislation has the propensity to have a massive impact on not only recycling efforts but also on business procedures.

The legislation affects each and every business in the UK; anyone who produces waste.

With a lack of understanding about what the legislation requires, there is the potential for millions of businesses to be breaking the law.

But what does pretreatment actually mean? The term is somewhat misleading, but the Environment Agency has defined the action as a three-point test which essentially requires all businesses to meet all of the following criteria:

- It must be a physical, thermal, chemical or biological process which can include sorting.
- It must change the characteristics of the waste.
- It must do so in order to reduce volume, reduce hazardous nature, facilitate handling or enhance recovery.

That all sounds very complicated but for most businesses compliance will be easy: simply ensure that you collect and recycle at least one waste stream, for example paper, and you meet the requirements.

The legislation has been introduced with a view to encouraging businesses to recycle more.

In fact, by introducing a recycling scheme into your business you can engage with your employees and take the legislation further than the requirements.

It provides the perfect platform to enter into discussions on wastefulness in the office, improving efficiency and introducing other environmentally friendly initiatives. For example, provide paper cups rather than plastic at the water fountains, discourage photocopying and unnecessary printing, and move towards a paperless office. These steps will not only be environmentally beneficial but they may also reduce your overheads.

YouGov research has indicated that as many as 80% of companies are not aware of the pre-treatment law requirement and that recycling constitutes pretreatment.

Like all waste management companies, Premier Waste had to ensure that all its customers knew and understood the legislation, and prior to 30 October all customers were contacted either via the sales team or by a direct mailout. The lack of awareness indicated by the YouGov survey was proven phone calls from concerned customers started to come through to the sales team.

In fact, many of the larger business customers are already meeting the requirements with recycling schemes that have been in place for a number of years.

It is the SMEs that are more likely not to be aware and not to comply. Premier Waste is offering a pre-treatment service for customers who want it conducted for them.

Any customer who doesn't sign up to the scheme has to provide Premier Waste with written confirmation that they are conducting a pretreatment action themselves.

One customer, Elring Parts in Gateshead, is a prime example of a company moving towards meeting the legislation. The company has been recycling and shredding waste paper from the packaging material for a number of years, as well as reusing cardboard. However, when the

legislation was introduced the company found the term 'pretreatment' misleading and was concerned it was not meeting requirements, even though clearly it was. Since 30 October the company has increased its recycling efforts to benefit the environment even further.

Clearly, many businesses will already be compliant with the legislation, but the term 'pre-treatment' is misleading and confusing. The message is quite simple: recycle whatever you can and you will not only meet the requirements of the EU directive but you will be helping the environment, too.

And let's not forget – that is the reason why this law has been introduced.