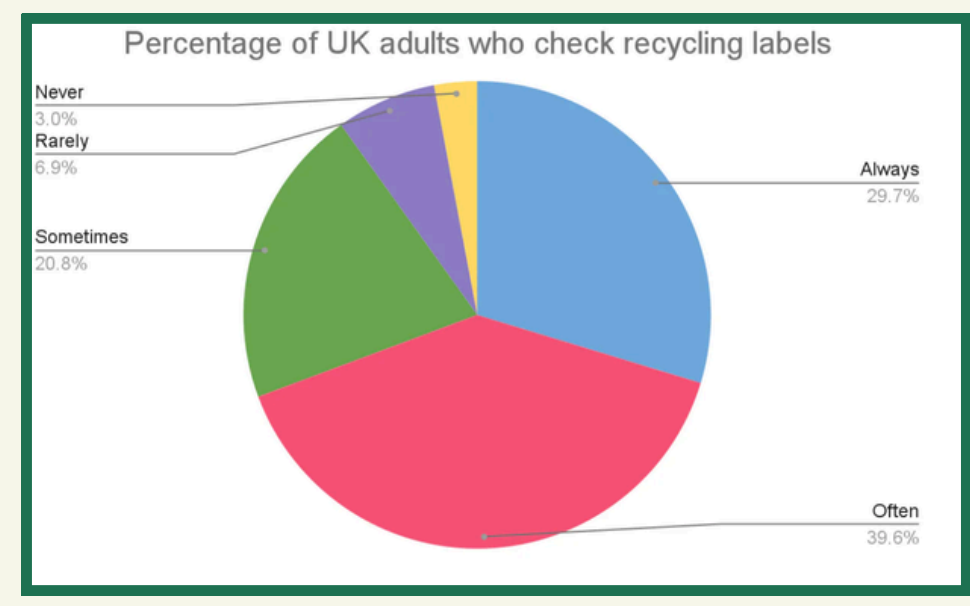


Reduce, Reuse, Rethink: Putting an end to the recycling confusion!



1) The problem

Did you know that in the UK, 84% of households are accidentally contaminating their recycling? But why could this be? According to a tesco 'understanding recycling symbols' document, there are roughly 20 recycling labels, all having different conditions and requirements to ensure the packaging is fit for the correct bin. Even worldwide there are 465 ecolabels, with a large 87 of them belonging to the UK alone!



Wider view of recycling within the UK:

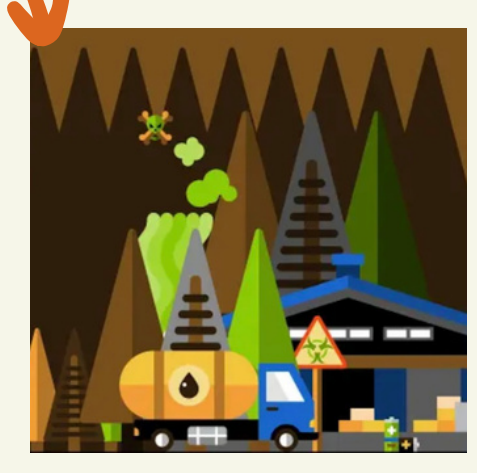
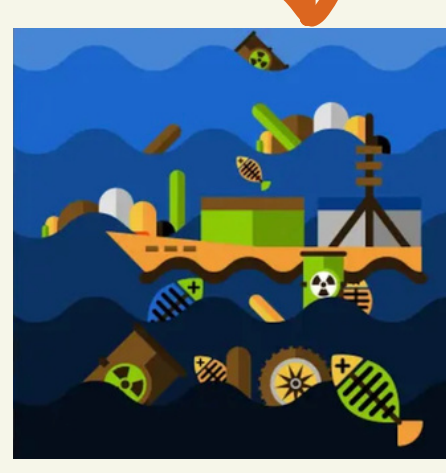
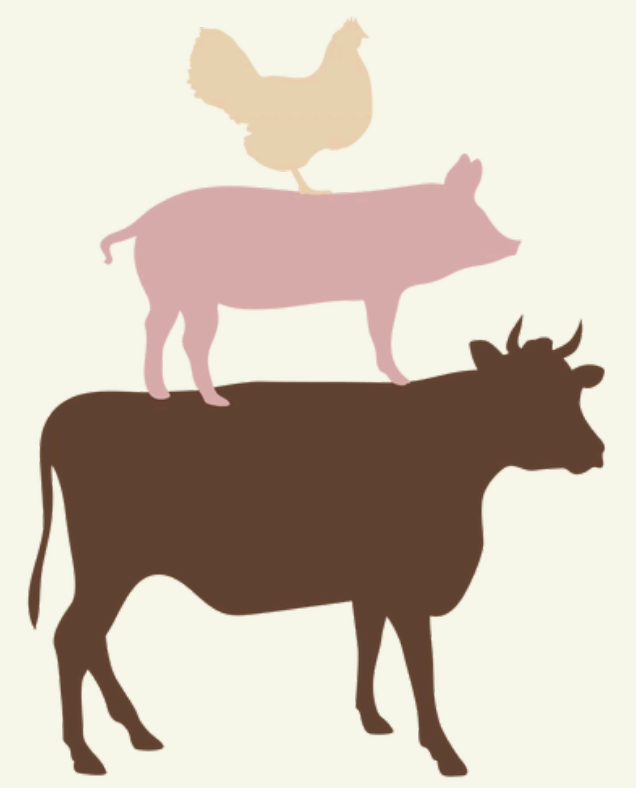
DEFRA revealed that in the UK, british households create over 26 million tonnes of waste each year, and from this value 12 million tonnes are recycled, and 14 million tonnes are sent to landfill. Of these values, 5 million tonnes of it is plastic alone and this includes around 15 million single-use plastic bottles per day! This gives the country an average recycling rate of 45% which compared to other countries: Austria (59%), Taiwan (53%) and Netherlands (51%), puts the UK as having one of the lower recycling rates.

Impacts on the environment when products aren't correctly recycled:

Eventhough individually the impact may not see significant if packaging is placed in the wrong bin, or recycling instructions aren't perfectly followed- but collectively it adds up to a significant environmental impact and can harm wildlife! In the British countryside thousands of land animals are killed with a direct link to plastic rubbish.

Improper waste disposal can lead to a wide range of pollutants:

- Land pollution- contents break down and seep into the surrounding area which is dangerous for wildlife and humans.
- Water pollution- rubbish breaks down in the water and contaminates the area, due to the composition of water, the pollutants don't easily leave the water, making freshwater unsafe for human consumption and the body of water toxic.
- Air pollution- the breakdown of the rubbish releases methane and greenhouse gases which are main contributors to global climate change.



2) Solution

A



Educating the population. Through enforcing environmental knowledge within schools- specifically primary schools, as younger generations are more impressionable. If education around recycling is implemented towards children, this will help to make them more conscientious adults and build habits of the correct recycling. When these children understand the importance of recycling, they are more likely to recycle consistently, and correctly leading to a long-term impact.

B



Advocation of reusable water bottles. This is an easy way of tackling the recycling issue around plastic contamination. Nearly 100 million plastic bottles are used everyday but only 1 in 5 of these bottles are recycled correctly, so reusable water bottles can cut down on the amount of plastic waste in the environment.

C



Unified eco labels. This is to try and reduce the confusion around the 87 which already exist in the UK. Professor Robin May said in an interview with ITV News- "Currently, there are no internationally agreed standards for eco-labelling, or for what type of data should be measured. This must be addressed urgently through collaboration between business, academia and government, so that the food system can be set on a path to sustainability." However, the main labels to be addressed in this instance are ones relating to recycling, even if it is just the advocacy of just one label which already exists to more products across the UK. On Pack Recycling Label (OPRL) is stated as the easiest recycling label to follow and is already used by around 420 charities and companies across the country.

3) Implementation

A

There are many ways to incorporate education around recycling into the school curriculum. It can fall under science studies, PSHE and enrichment as it is a social issue which needs to be addressed. As the younger generation is the one which is going to be targeted, the implementation needs to be engaging.

This could involve:

- Recycling activities and competition involving upcycling and separation of waste, with there being a prize as the end goal to motivate success.
- Field trips to recycling plants and waste management facilities, this is seen as an exciting opportunity to younger children as it involves a 'day off school' but it is also a chance for them to become educated in the field of recycling.
- Have 'green days' where there's a range of activities surrounding recycling and informing children on which materials can go into which bins, as well as advocating the importance of why things need to go into specific bins.
- Promote 'eco clubs'- which may not even specifically relate to recycling, but it allows the children to feel closer to the environment and understand its beauty. Which could lead to them wanting to protect it through recycling correctly.



CASE STUDY

A primary school Lincolnshire, Boston West Academy has 'outdoor learning' embedded into their curriculum already, they say it helps with "developing their direct connection with and understanding of the natural environment." - which in turn will allow for them to become educated children and build eco-conscious habits.

The advocacy of reusable water bottles can be implemented through social media campaigns and the use of influencers on apps such as TikTok and Instagram. Nowadays, reusable water bottles can be fashionable and trendy, with popular brands such as:

- Stanley
- Chilly's
- Owalas



As well as the actual promotion of the use of the water bottles, there needs to be an increase in water refill stations in areas such as: parks, schools, offices and public places. Regulations regarding refill stations are that once installed local councils and businesses must adhere to public health guidelines and water safety standards through regular maintenance and hygiene checks in order to prevent bacterial contamination. There's a company called Refill UK are trying to promote the availability of water refill stations at the specific aim of reducing single-use plastic.

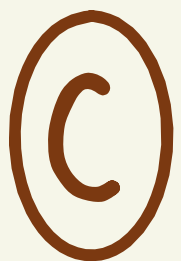
Another way of promoting the use of reusable water bottles is through company incentives, such as discount codes for those who bring reusable bottles, or loyalty schemes where people receive points for refilling bottles/ using reusable ones. Some companies already using this technique are: Costa, Starbucks, Greggs and Caffé Nero.

**CAFFÉ
NERO**



GREGGS

The implementation of a single, uniformed recycling label is the most complex solution to put in place. The best way would be to get companies on board with the use of a label such as OPRL. This can happen through explaining what is in it for the company using the label- such as the use of the label demonstrates that the company cares for the environment which means that consumers may feel more positively towards it. OPRL is a widely recognized eco label, so it reduces the chances of buying products from companies who greenwash. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of greenwashing- so this increases the trust between companies and consumers. As OPRL is easy to follow, it can ease the stress of consumers when it comes to the disposal of products after use. The label could also be sold to companies through competition- as eco-conscious consumerism is on the rise if companies adopt OPRL it could set them apart from others who don't have a clear labelling strategy.



The enforcement of this solution has more rules and regulations than the other ones. In order to use OPRL businesses must become members of the OPRL scheme and adhere to its guidelines, their membership allows companies to determine the recyclability of their packaging based on the current UK standards. The OPRL guidelines state that if 75% or more of local authorities across the UK collect the packaging in question it can be labelled 'Recycle' and if fewer than 50% of UK local authorities collect the type of packaging it is to be labelled 'Do Not Recycle'.

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