Plasterboard Recycling
What is WRAP doing about gypsum waste?

WRAP (the Waste & Resources Action Programme) is a major UK programme established to promote resource efficiency. Its particular focus is on creating stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products and removing barriers to waste minimisation, re-use and recycling.

A not-for-profit company in the private sector, WRAP is backed by substantial Government funding from Defra and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To support this WRAP has produced a series of "How to" guides offering clear and simple tools enabling the construction sector to develop good on-site waste management practices.

These are available in different formats for use by environmental managers, site foremen, and all site personnel.

Specific guidance is included for the management of plasterboard waste.

How WRAP can help you
WRAP can help you to manage your plasterboard waste, providing information and guidance on:

• on-site segregation and collection of plasterboard waste;
• waste minimisation;
• solutions for linking to plasterboard recycling infrastructure; and
• the benefits of strategic plasterboard waste management.

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WRAP (the Waste & Resources Action Programme) is developing a number of initiatives to support the segregation, collection and recycling of used plasterboard, and the development of new and existing end-market uses.

The challenge

Every year construction and demolition activities in the UK create over a million tonnes of plasterboard and gypsum waste. At the moment almost all of this goes into landfill sites. Not only is this a poor use of resources, it can also cause environmental impacts.

Disposal of plasterboard to landfill is a waste of a valuable gypsum resource, and can also cause environmental impacts.

Plasterboard recycling is currently at an immature stage in the UK. The challenge facing industry is a simple one – to establish a coherent infrastructure that sustains collection and recycling of waste plasterboard, and also supports the development of viable end-uses for recycled gypsum.

The drivers

Two factors are beginning to provide a “push and pull” effect to drive plasterboard recycling forward.

Push Factor

Since July 2005 the EU Landfill Directive means that concentrations of gypsum wastes (such as plasterboard) must be disposed of in separately engineered cells at landfill sites. These are more expensive to manage. This provides an economic incentive to segregate plasterboard and other gypsum waste products from the waste stream, and therefore encourages their recycling.

Pull Factor

Many construction and demolition companies now realise that they can gain financial benefits from segregating waste materials. As more companies follow suit the market will experience a powerful pull effect which will lead to an increase in plasterboard recycling.

How can recycled gypsum waste be used?

Gypsum is a fairly ‘simple’ material that can be reused time and again without altering its fundamental properties. Recycled gypsum can therefore be used as a replacement for virgin gypsum (whether natural or synthetic) in a number of applications. For example:

- plasterboard manufacture;
- agriculture and horticulture;
- cement manufacture;
- construction products; and
- civil engineering.

Until now many of these possible end uses have not been extensively investigated or pursued in the UK.

WRAP’s activities in plasterboard recycling

WRAP is funding a number of projects to influence and develop all elements of the supply chain in order to promote the benefits of plasterboard recycling:

Segregation & collection

- trials of effective methods of segregation & collection on construction and demolition sites, and
- collection trials at household waste recycling centres (civic amenity sites).

Developing end uses in construction

- road construction;
- slope stabilisation; and
- unfired clay blocks.

Developing end uses in other areas

- ceramic moulds;
- livestock bedding;
- agricultural soil improvement; and
- compost for mushroom growing.

Disposal of plasterboard to landfill is a waste of a valuable gypsum resource, and can also cause environmental impacts.

Standards & specifications

WRAP is working with the relevant industry sectors to identify, develop and publish new standards and specifications to cover the production and use of recycled gypsum.

These new standards and specifications will help end-users to buy and use recycled gypsum with confidence by providing better quality assurance.

They will also help the relevant bodies make informed decisions regarding the point at which the material ceases to be classified as waste and can be regarded as a product.

Disseminating information

The WRAP website will be developed to become a primary source of free, independent information and guidance on the segregation, collection, recycling and use of waste plasterboard. On the website you will find:

- case studies, good practice guidance, specifications;
- results from the research and trials; and
- progress on the WRAP programme and projects.

WRAP will also be running events and attending conferences to promote these messages.

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