



Gloucestershire Trading Standards Service

Martin's Pod

Zero Waste Week

January 2009

Hello I'm Martin Bruton from Trading Standards.

Have you ever purchased something thinking that the amount of packaging surrounding it was unnecessary? Despite increases in recycling, domestic waste has risen by 20% in the last ten years with five million tonnes of packaging being dumped annually. Packaging accounts for one-third of an average household's total waste. With January 26th being the start of zero waste week we thought you might be interested to hear what role Trading Standards have to play in minimising the waste we produce every year.

I am joined by Heather one of our Senior officers who will explain a little bit more about all this. So Heather, what is being done to tackle this huge problem.

Heather

Well, the big food retailers have signed up to an agreement, called the '**Courtauld commitment**' to slash packaging waste within five years and also to tackle the amount of food that goes to waste. What is really needed is for consumers to be more aware of the issues here, and where possible not purchase items that are packaged unnecessarily. By thinking more about what we buy at the supermarket and by choosing products with little or no packaging, waste would be cut significantly. Incidentally, for some great tips on how to avoid food waste check out our 'Digest This' food blog and look our resident blogger for Rob Rees post.

Martin

Heather, can you tell me about the laws in this country that cover 'excess packaging'?

Heather

The main piece of legislation is 'The Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations which amongst other things aims to minimise packaging weight and volume, and reduce packaging waste in line with an individual product's safety, hygiene and consumer acceptance.

Martin

But these regulations have been in force for at least five years, but we still find products with what seems like excessive packaging. Why is this?

Heather

Well, existing legislation enables prosecution of companies that use excessive packaging, but the burden of proof is very high and we do not get that many complaints from the public about excessive packaging. This makes it harder for Trading Standards to produce evidence that a product has unnecessary packaging.

Also packers and importers can set their own 'performance criteria' for packaging which includes:

- Product protection
- Packaging manufacture process
- Packing or filling process

- Logistics (including transport, warehousing and handling)
- Product presentation and marketing
- Consumer acceptance
- Product information
- Safety

So essentially we have to be able to show that the packaging was beyond what was necessary. It is always helpful to us when we have complaints from the public, so I would like to encourage people to report problems when they come across them.

Martin

So what is zero waste week?

Heather

From the 26th January to the 1st February 2009, the aim of the week is to encourage as many people as possible to reduce the amount of waste they produce as well as recycle and compost as much as possible. The environment team here in Gloucestershire tell me that we are throwing away on average almost 3kg of food every week, that is the equivalent of 390 tins of baked beans every year! This wasted food usually ends up in landfill, where it contributes to the production of methane - a potent greenhouse gas - that is harmful to the environment. So something clearly needs to be done and we are using zero waste week as an opportunity to tell the public more about this. I hear around 1000 people will be participating!

Martin

Sounds like a great opportunity for people to get involved!

Heather

It is, for listeners who want to learn more about this log onto www.recycleforgloucestershire.com/ and sign up!

Martin

And you will be featuring recycling messages on the VISION food hall website?

Heather

We will! We fully support the work of the Gloucestershire Environment Service and have teamed up with them to add recycling messages to our VISION food hall. Such messages will be live in the next few weeks on www.visionfoodhall.com.

Martin

Thanks Heather. So if anyone listening has examples of products with unnecessary packaging or would like to discuss this topic further we would love to hear from you!
You can get in touch through our website www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/glos