



Recycle right:

HOW BETTER RECYCLING SYSTEMS CAN REDUCE COSTS,
CONTAMINATION AND OPERATIONAL HEADACHES



The compliance deadline has passed.

NOW THE REAL COST IS BECOMING CLEAR.





Simpler Recycling came into force in March 2025. Most hospitality businesses got something in place. Bins were ordered, waste streams were labelled, boxes were ticked.

But for many venues, the systems installed during the compliance rush are now costing more to live with than they saved at the point of purchase. Equipment bought on price is failing. Contamination surcharges are arriving that weren't in the original budget. And the ongoing cost of replacements, contractor penalties and lost productivity is quietly exceeding the initial investment, spread across budget lines that make it hard to see in one place.

With Digital Waste Tracking becoming mandatory in October 2026 and plastic film packaging segregation required from March 2027, your current system is about to come under scrutiny it may not be ready for.

This guide is for the people who approve the budget and sign off the procurement. It's about what waste management is actually costing your business, and what acting now can deliver.

IN THIS GUIDE, YOU'LL FIND:

-  Where the real costs of waste management sit, and why they're easy to miss.
-  What the next regulatory deadlines mean for your business.
-  How to build a financial case for upgrading your waste management.
-  Real results from hospitality venues that invested in getting it right.



The Regulatory Roadmap

COMPLIANCE ISN'T A DESTINATION. IT'S A MOVING TARGET.

The standard landfill tax rate rose in April 2026 to:

£130.75 per tonne*

*Source: GOV.UK

Simpler Recycling was the start of a regulatory shift, not the end of one. The direction of travel is clear, and two more milestones are fast approaching.

OCTOBER 2026: DIGITAL WASTE TRACKING BECOMES MANDATORY.

All permitted and licensed waste receiving sites must record and report waste movements through a centralised government digital platform. For your business, this means your waste data, including contamination rates, volumes and disposal destinations, becomes a timestamped, auditable digital record that regulators can access in real time.

If your current systems are generating high contamination, that will no longer be a hidden cost. It will be a visible one.

31 MARCH 2027: PLASTIC FILM PACKAGING MUST BE SEPARATELY COLLECTED.

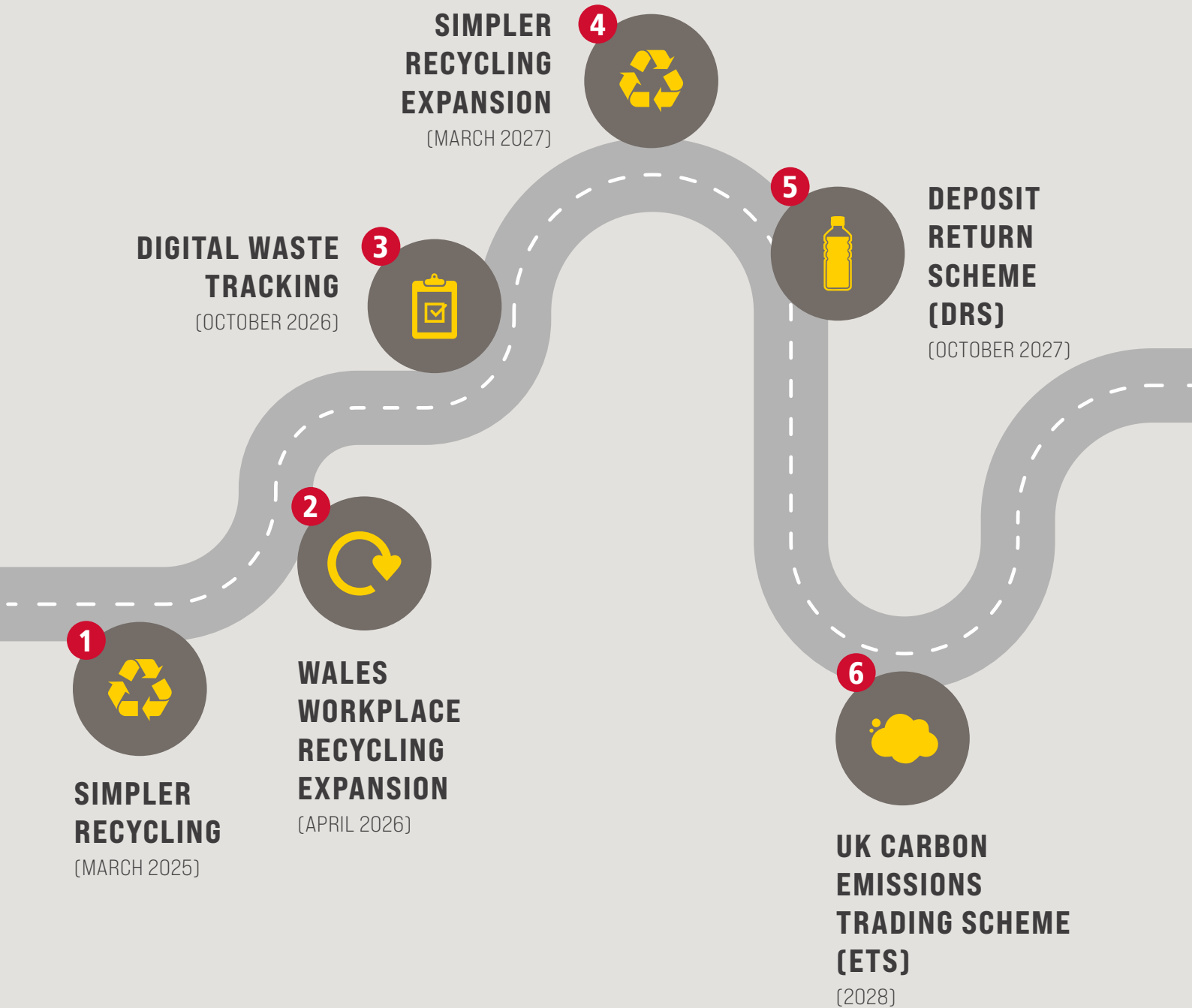
Laundry wrapping, amenity packaging, catering film, cleaning supply packaging, delivery wrapping: all of it becomes a legally mandated separate waste stream. This creates both a compliance requirement and a procurement decision. Do you retrofit your existing system, or do you address current underperformance and the 2027 requirement in a single upgrade?

Tip: The 2027 plastic film mandate is a natural trigger for a full review of your waste management. Venues that address current operational issues and prepare for 2027 in a single procurement avoid paying twice: once to patch what isn't working, and again to add capacity for the new requirement.

Taken together, these deadlines don't just raise the compliance bar. They increase the visibility of how well, or how poorly, your waste infrastructure is actually performing.



Recycling Legislation Roadmap



1



SIMPLER RECYCLING

All businesses in England with 10 or more full-time employees must now separate different waste streams on site, prior to collection from a waste contractor. These waste streams are food, mixed recycling (glass, plastics, metals), paper and card, and general waste.

2



WALES WORKPLACE RECYCLING EXPANSION

Wales' workplace recycling rules apply to NHS and private hospitals. In addition, all workplaces need to recycle small electricals (items with a plug, battery or cable which measures 50cm or less on every side) from this date.

3



DIGITAL WASTE TRACKING

All businesses with a permit or licence to receive waste will be required to log movement and disposal of waste in an online platform to help crack down on waste crimes like fly-tipping.

4



SIMPLER RECYCLING EXPANSION

Simpler Recycling will also apply to 'micro-firms' with fewer than 10 full-time employees. All businesses will need to separate plastic film and plastic bags in addition to the existing waste streams introduced in 2025.

5



DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME (DRS)

Businesses who produce or sell bottled / canned drinks will need to provide a refundable deposit on recyclable single-use drinks containers, including plastic bottles and metal cans.

6



UK CARBON EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME (ETS)

Waste incineration and energy-from-waste industries will be included in the ETS, meaning they will be subject to a cap on carbon emissions. This may cause the cost of incinerating non-recyclable waste to increase.

The cost of getting it wrong

THE TOTAL COST IS HIGHER THAN THE PURCHASE PRICE SUGGESTS. IT'S JUST HARDER TO SEE.

The challenge with waste management costs is that they're distributed. The purchase price sits in procurement. The contamination surcharges sit in facilities. The productivity drag sits in operations. The equipment replacements sit in maintenance. And because no single budget holder sees the full picture, the true cost of a system that isn't performing can go unnoticed for months.

Here's where the money goes.

CONTAMINATION SURCHARGES

One misplaced item can compromise an entire waste stream, and your waste contractor will notice before you do. The penalty comes straight off your operational budget. As separation requirements tighten and Digital Waste Tracking creates better data for enforcement, tolerance for contamination is only going to decrease. These surcharges are often the first sign that a system isn't working, but they rarely get attributed back to the equipment that caused them.

EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT CYCLES

Products bought at the lowest available price point under compliance pressure in early 2025 are already failing: cracked bins, broken lids, jammed mechanisms. Each replacement generates a purchase order, a delivery, an installation, and a disruption to operations. Over a two to three year cycle, the cumulative cost of repeated replacements can exceed the cost of buying more durable products from the outset.

LOST PRODUCTIVITY

When recycling provision is poorly placed or inadequately sized, staff spend time making unnecessary journeys or correcting errors that a better system would prevent. In larger venues or multi-site operations, this is a measurable operational cost, but it's one that rarely gets tracked back to waste management.

USERS YOU CAN'T CONTROL

Hotel guests, event visitors, leisure members, members of the public: in hospitality, much of your waste is generated by people you can't train. Your system has to work despite unpredictable behaviour, not because of compliance. That's a design and equipment decision, not a training one.

REPUTATIONAL EXPOSURE

ESG commitments, Green Key or similar accreditations, sustainability reporting, client audits: waste performance is increasingly visible to stakeholders. Gaps in your waste management don't just cost money. They create reputational risk, and in hospitality, reputation is the business.



The solution

THE FINANCIAL CASE FOR GETTING WASTE MANAGEMENT RIGHT

The question isn't whether to invest in waste management. You already have. The question is whether what you've invested in is delivering, and what acting now would actually return.

For procurement and general managers, the business case comes down to three things: reducing the total cost of waste management, getting ahead of the next regulatory deadline, and doing both without disrupting operations. Here's how.

START WITH THE EVIDENCE

Before making any procurement decisions, review the waste data from your waste contractor; are there any obvious areas for improvement? Then take a waste walk with colleagues from operations, facilities or sustainability to understand what help they, and other areas of the business, need. Their first-hand view of where the current system is breaking down is what turns contractor data into a credible business case.

On average, recycling rates can be improved by

30% when effective multi-stream recycling is implemented*

*Source: RCP Recycling Audit Tool

Tip: If you're building a business case for an upgrade, the waste walk and the Recycling Audit Tool together give you the data you need: current contamination rates, projected savings, and a clear before-and-after that finance teams and boards can act on.





CHOOSE THE RIGHT SOLUTION FOR EACH AREA

Different spaces in your venue have different waste profiles, and your recycling provision needs to reflect that. In busy communal areas like kitchens, canteens and staff break rooms, centralised multi-stream recycling stations handle high volumes and multiple waste types in one place. In areas where waste is generated more sporadically, such as corridors, meeting rooms or individual service areas, smaller individual bins keep recycling accessible without adding extra steps to the workflow. For outdoor areas, durable containers that can withstand changing weather conditions keep your waste separation consistent. The key is matching the right bins and stations, in the right sizes, to the right locations.

THINK TOTAL COST, NOT UNIT PRICE

Recycling infrastructure in a hospitality environment is not domestic equipment. It needs to withstand constant use, heavy footfall, commercial cleaning and fast-paced operations. Equipment that isn't built for that will fail, and the long-run cost of replacements, contamination penalties and maintenance time can exceed the cost of buying better from the outset.

Modular systems with bins of different sizes give you the flexibility to configure each area to its needs, and reconfigure as and when your needs change or what you're collecting changes, without requiring wholesale replacement. That's procurement value: you invest once in a system that adapts, rather than repeatedly in equipment that doesn't last.

MAKE IT EASY TO GET RIGHT

Colour-coded bins and stations with image-led signage reduce contamination by removing guesswork at the point of disposal. In venues with international visitors or multilingual staff, visual labelling is essential. RCP's Label Customisation Portal lets you tailor your labelling to your specific venue. Consistent colour-coding across all areas, front and back of house, creates a unified system that everyone can follow. Lower contamination means lower surcharges, which directly reduces your waste management costs.



Waste walk first: Physically audit your venue to build the evidence base for a business case.



Right solution, right place: Centralised stations for busy communal areas; individual bins where waste is generated more sporadically; durable outdoor containers for external spaces.



Total cost of ownership: Compare lifecycle costs, not purchase prices; factor in contamination surcharges, replacement frequency and productivity impact.



Match product to area: Kitchens, lobbies, corridors, leisure areas and outdoor spaces all have different needs; use bins and stations of different sizes to serve each one properly.



Single procurement: Address current underperformance and prepare for 2027 in one upgrade, not two.

HOW TO CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL WASTE WALK



1 TRACK YOUR BASELINE:

Establish your current recycling rates and disposal costs before you start. You can't demonstrate ROI without a starting point, and you'll need the numbers to build the business case.



2 MAP YOUR VENUE:

List every area that generates waste, from kitchens and guest areas to loading bays, staff rooms and outdoor spaces, and mark key collection points on a site plan before you walk.



3 AUDIT DURING PEAK OPERATIONS:

Visit during a typical busy period to see the system under real conditions, not best-case ones.



4 TALK TO YOUR PEOPLE:

Cleaning staff, caretakers and front-of-house teams see what the system is actually doing. Their observations are often more accurate than any formal reporting.



5 RECORD EVERYTHING:

Photograph problem areas, note volumes and waste types, and document where contamination is occurring.

WHAT ACTING NOW ACTUALLY DELIVERS

The venues that act now have a clear advantage: they fix the current problems on their terms, not under deadline pressure. They go into Digital Waste Tracking with clean data, not excuses. And they stop absorbing the hidden costs that have been quietly building since the 2025 compliance rush.

For procurement and general managers, there's a timing advantage too. The 2027 plastic film requirement will demand changes to your waste management regardless. Venues that address current underperformance and prepare for 2027 in a single procurement cycle avoid paying twice.

Multi-stream recycling has been shown to help hospitality venues:

reduce waste management costs by:

32%

*Source: RCP Recycling Audit Tool

and improve recycling rates by:

30%*

Success stories

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT WORKS

THE MERRION HOTEL: UNIFIED PROCUREMENT, MEASURABLE RETURNS.

The Merrion, a five-star hotel in Dublin, had a disjointed waste management system: different containers, inconsistent signage, and rising disposal costs. The hotel's ambitious target of becoming a zero-waste operation was stalling, and the fragmented approach was costing more than it should.

Rather than patching the existing system, The Merrion partnered with RCP to replace it entirely with unified, colour-coded bins and stations featuring consistent labelling throughout the hotel. The hotel then developed a Level 1 Zero Waste training programme built around the new equipment, and within two months, over 70% of the workforce had completed it. The result was a 13% increase in recycling rate, bringing The Merrion to 74% overall, with substantial financial benefits from reduced waste disposal costs.

The investment delivered on multiple fronts: lower costs, better data, stronger staff engagement and a credible sustainability story for guests and stakeholders.

"Our holistic approach, encompassing equipment upgrades, staff training, and process optimisation, has transformed our waste management practices. By creating a supportive environment for recycling, we have not only reduced our environmental impact but also achieved substantial financial benefits."

Marcin Sady, Head of Procurement and Sustainability, The Merrion Hotel





TORFAEN LEISURE TRUST: MULTI-SITE ROLLOUT, PROJECTED 39% COST SAVINGS.

Torfaen Leisure Trust (TLT) manages five leisure sites across the borough of Torfaen. With new recycling legislation approaching in Wales and sustainability as a strategic priority, TLT needed a solution that could be rolled out consistently across all five sites.

The first step was an in-depth site walk with the RCP team, identifying where improvements to processes and products could reduce the amount of waste sent to general disposal. The findings were clear: high potential for improved waste separation, missed opportunities to capture recyclable waste, and a lack of standardisation leading to poor results.

TLT implemented seven waste streams across the facilities using Slim Jim® Recycling Stations, with customised TLT-branded dual language labels and consistent colour-coding. The modular capability of the stations allowed a tailored yet consistent approach, with the appropriate streams introduced in each specific area. For outdoor areas, Plaza® Containers were installed to withstand changing weather conditions. The projected results: an estimated 32% improvement in recycling rate and a 39% reduction in waste management costs.

“The team at RCP helped us to identify where and how we could make improvements and the projections for our cost and waste savings were impressive. Not only do the new recycling stations look smart at our centres, but they are also driving higher rates of recycling throughout the facilities. As well as making significant strides towards our sustainability targets, we’re also cutting costs, so we are delighted with the results so far.”

Owen Thomas, General Manager, TLT

Speak to one of our experts

READY TO BUILD THE BUSINESS CASE?

A waste walk costs nothing. And the data they generate gives you a clear, evidence-based starting point, whether you're building a case for investment, preparing for Digital Waste Tracking, getting ahead of the 2027 plastic film requirement, or simply want to know what your current system is actually costing you.

I work with hospitality businesses across the UK to improve waste infrastructure and deliver the kind of returns you've just read about. If you'd like to talk through where your venue stands, get in touch.



Chris Davis

Waste Adviser

Rubbermaid Commercial Products

chris.davis3@newellco.com

07919 305 195

Tip: Not sure where to start? Ask about a waste walk. It's a structured, no-commitment audit of your current provision that gives you an honest picture of where things are working, where they're not, and what fixing them would realistically deliver. It's also the foundation for a business case your board can act on.



rubbermaid.eu | ISO 9001 certified

[linkedin/RCPEUR](https://www.linkedin.com/company/rcpeur) [facebook/RCPEUR](https://www.facebook.com/rcpeur)