



Recycle right:

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



The compliance deadline has passed.

NOW YOUR DATA IS ABOUT TO BE TESTED.

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

But compliance and performance are not the same thing. For many venues, the systems installed during the rush are generating contamination rates that undermine the recycling data you're reporting. Equipment bought on price is already failing, creating replacement waste that works against your sustainability targets. And the gap between what your waste management system is supposed to be delivering and what it's actually delivering is about to become much harder to hide.

Digital Waste Tracking becomes mandatory in October 2026. Plastic film packaging segregation is required from March 2027. Both will increase the scrutiny on your waste performance data. If your current system isn't delivering the numbers you need, the window to fix it before that scrutiny arrives is narrowing.

This guide is for sustainability professionals in hospitality who want to close the gap between their reporting and their reality.

IN THIS GUIDE, YOU'LL FIND:



Why recycling compliance and recycling performance are not the same thing.



What the next regulatory deadlines mean for your sustainability data.



How to build the evidence base for upgrading your waste management.



Real results from hospitality venues that turned waste into a measurable sustainability win.



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. For sustainability professionals, these aren't just compliance deadlines. They're data deadlines.

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. This replaces paper-based waste transfer notes with timestamped, auditable digital records of your waste, including its origin, classification and destination.

For sustainability teams, this changes the landscape. Waste performance data that was previously self-reported or estimated will increasingly be verifiable. If your contamination rates are higher than your ESG reports suggest, or your recycling rates are lower than your targets imply, that discrepancy will become visible to auditors, stakeholders and regulators. It will also surface the split between waste types, which means claims of "zero waste to landfill" will increasingly be met with the harder follow-up question of "why so much to incineration?"

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

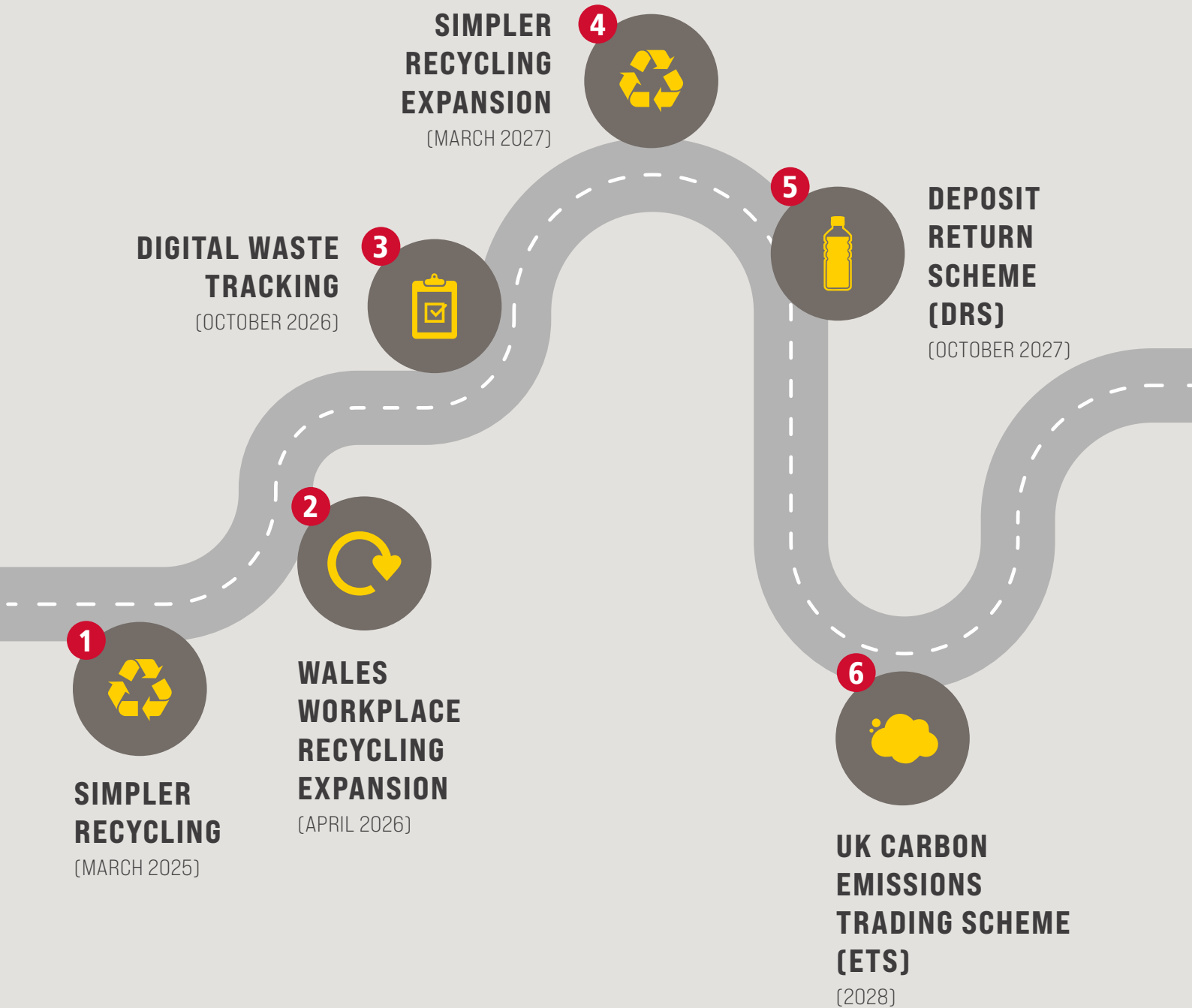
Laundry wrapping, amenity packaging, catering film, cleaning supply packaging, delivery wrapping: all of it becomes a legally mandated separate waste stream. For sustainability managers, this creates both a compliance requirement and an opportunity. Venues that use the 2027 deadline to conduct a full review of their waste management can address current underperformance and future-proof their systems in a single step.

Tip: The 2027 plastic film mandate is a natural trigger for a comprehensive review. Rather than retrofitting your existing system for one new stream, use it as a catalyst to address the issues that have been building since the 2025 compliance rush. One well-planned upgrade is more effective, and more defensible in your reporting, than a series of reactive patches.

Taken together, these deadlines don't just raise the compliance bar. They increase the visibility and verifiability of your waste performance data.



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

POOR WASTE MANAGEMENT ISN'T JUST AN OPERATIONAL COST. IT'S A REPORTING RISK.

For sustainability professionals, ineffective waste management creates two problems. The operational cost: contamination surcharges, equipment replacements, lost productivity. And the reporting risk: the gap it opens between your stated performance and your actual performance.

Here's where the risks sit.

CONTAMINATION UNDERMINES YOUR DATA

One misplaced item can compromise an entire waste stream. Your waste contractor notices, applies a surcharge, and your recycling rate drops. But if your reporting is based on estimates rather than verified data, you may not even know it's happened. As Digital Waste Tracking creates more accurate records, discrepancies between reported and actual performance will become harder to explain.

EQUIPMENT FAILURE CREATES WASTE, NOT JUST COST

Bins bought at the lowest price point during the 2025 compliance rush may already be failing: cracked containers, broken lids, jammed mechanisms. Every replacement generates waste that works against your targets.

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 prevent contamination through design, not rely on user compliance. Without that, your contamination data will always be higher than it needs to be.

GREENWASHING EXPOSURE

ESG commitments, Green Key or similar accreditations, net zero targets, annual sustainability reports: the claims you make about waste performance are increasingly visible. If your reported recycling rates are based on systems that aren't delivering those rates, the reputational risk is significant. Credible sustainability data starts with systems that produce credible results.

THE COST OF BUYING CHEAP

Procurement decisions made under compliance pressure in early 2025 are already coming home. The upfront saving disappears quickly when you factor in replacement frequency, contamination surcharges and the sustainability cost of equipment that doesn't last.



The solution

HOW TO TURN WASTE MANAGEMENT INTO A MEASURABLE SUSTAINABILITY ASSET

For sustainability professionals, the challenge isn't making the case that waste management matters. It's producing the evidence that your systems are delivering, and building the internal support to improve them when they're not.

START WITH THE EVIDENCE

Before making any recommendations internally, you need a clear picture of what your current system is actually delivering. That's where a waste walk comes in: a systematic, physical tour of your venue that maps waste generation points, identifies where contamination is occurring, and surfaces the gaps between what your system is supposed to do and what it's actually doing. As the sustainability lead, you're well placed to mobilise this. Bring colleagues from operations, facilities and procurement along on the walk so they see the challenges first-hand; when you present the findings later, they'll already be invested in fixing them.

On average, recycling rates can be improved by

30% when effective multi-stream recycling is implemented*

*Source: RCP Recycling Audit Tool

Tip: The waste walk and the Recycling Audit Tool together give you the data to build a coalition internally. Operations can see the productivity gains. Facilities can see the contamination reduction. Procurement can see the total cost of ownership. And you can demonstrate measurable progress against your sustainability targets. Multi-departmental business cases are consistently more effective at securing budget approval than single-stakeholder requests.





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 or high capacity containers 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. For outdoor areas, durable containers that can withstand changing weather conditions keep your waste separation consistent beyond the building's walls. The key is matching the right bins and stations, in the right sizes, to the right locations.

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 labelling to your specific venue. Consistent colour-coding across all areas creates a unified system that everyone can follow. Lower contamination means better data, which means more credible reporting.

INVEST IN DURABILITY

Recycling infrastructure in a hospitality environment needs to withstand constant use, heavy footfall and commercial cleaning. 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 legislation changes what you're collecting, without requiring wholesale replacement.



Waste walk first: Physically audit your venue to build a credible baseline for reporting and a business case for investment.



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



Clear labelling: Colour-coded, image-led signage reduces contamination and produces better data for your sustainability reporting.



Durability as sustainability: Longer-lasting equipment means fewer replacements, less waste and a more defensible environmental footprint.



Single procurement: Address current underperformance and prepare for 2027 in one upgrade; one well-planned investment is more reportable than a series of patches.

HOW TO CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL WASTE WALK



TRACK YOUR BASELINE:

Establish your current recycling rates and disposal costs before you start. This is your reporting benchmark and your starting point for demonstrating improvement.



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.



AUDIT DURING PEAK OPERATIONS:

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



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.



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 close the gap between their sustainability commitments and their actual performance before that gap becomes visible.

Improvements made now generate measurable before-and-after data that strengthens your next ESG report, accreditation application or board presentation.

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: FROM FRAGMENTED DATA TO MEASURABLE PROGRESS.

The Merrion, a five-star hotel in Dublin, had a disjointed waste management system: different containers, inconsistent signage, and staff who found recycling guidelines overly complex. The hotel's ambitious target of becoming a zero-waste operation was stalling, and the fragmented approach was making it difficult to produce credible waste performance data.

After partnering with RCP, The Merrion replaced its patchwork system with unified, colour-coded bins and stations featuring consistent labelling throughout the hotel. The hotel 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 disposal costs.

For the hotel's Head of Procurement and Sustainability, the value went beyond the numbers. A unified system with consistent processes produced consistent, reportable data, giving the hotel a credible foundation for its sustainability commitments.

“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





© The National Gallery, London. Photo Edmund Sumner, View of National Gallery Sainsbury Wing, 01



© The National Gallery, London. Photo Edmund Sumner, View of the Grand Staircase with the Rotunda and Jubilee Walk, 03B

THE NATIONAL GALLERY: 14 STREAMS, 75% RECYCLING, ZERO TO LANDFILL.

The National Gallery in London has placed waste at the heart of its sustainability approach. The gallery collects a total of 14 waste streams across the site and proudly recycles upwards of 75%, with the rest going to energy from waste and zero going to landfill. The gallery is also laying the groundwork to set net zero and environmental targets, aiming to integrate environmental responsibility into all aspects of its operations.

When the gallery opened new public spaces across its £85 million Sainsbury Wing refurbishment in 2024, it needed waste collection to support back-of-house operations across two coffee bars, two restaurants, event kitchens and lecture theatres. Having already used RCP's Slim Jim® Containers across the rest of the estate, the gallery rolled out the same range in the new wing to keep processes consistent. The flexibility, colour options and accessories allowed The National Gallery to maintain consistency and push its recycling rate towards 80%.

With logistical support from SOHO Commercial, the gallery launched the Sainsbury Wing complete with legislation-ready waste and recycling containers while many other organisations were still scrambling to comply with Simpler Recycling.

“We fully trust the Slim Jim® range from Rubbermaid following years of using it; their size, colour and accessory options mean they are super flexible, and we know the bins will last in fast-paced back of house environments.”

Katherine Peever, Environment & Sustainability Manager, The National Gallery

Speak to one of our experts

READY TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN COMMITMENT AND PERFORMANCE?

A waste walk costs nothing. And the data they generate gives you a clear, evidence-based starting point, whether you're preparing for Digital Waste Tracking, building a business case for investment, or simply want to know what your current system is delivering against your sustainability targets.

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



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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. The data it produces is the foundation for both internal business cases and credible sustainability reporting.



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