



Working document last updated March 2024

Vapes briefing

3 key take-aways

1. Vape producers, importers and trade bodies

Vape producers have a legal responsibility to finance take-back of vapes for recycling.

2. Vape retailers/sellers

Vape sellers have a legal responsibility to take back customers' old vapes for recycling and to tell their customers that they offer this.

3. Consumers

Consumers need to know that they should always recycle rather than bin or litter their vapes.

Environment Agency update March 2023:

Whole vapes should not be incinerated. They must be recycled.

Contents

1. Material Focus Introduction
2. What is e-waste and why is it relevant to vapes?
3. Vape fact and figures
4. How do I comply with the environmental regulations **as a producer**?
5. How do I comply with environmental regulations **as a retailer**?
 - a. Approved vape recycling services
 - b. How to communicate take-back of electricals and vapes
 - c. Communication toolkit
 - d. How to communicate vape recycling to the public
6. How do I act as a **local authority**?
7. Collection from HWRCs via the Producer Balancing System
8. Environment Agency update on incineration

Who are Material Focus?

We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation on a mission to get the UK fixing, donating and recycling all of their old and unwanted electricals. And stop precious resources from being lost forever. We do this through...

Insights

- Identifying, producing and sharing insightful, timely and impactful research to help build a better UK e-waste/ WEEE system.


Investments

- Identifying and funding projects which help make it easier for people to reuse and recycle electricals.

Inspiration

- Creating and delivering communications which help make it feel easier for people to reuse and recycle electricals through our [Recycle Your Electricals](#) campaign.

A bin is no place for a bulb. You wiiiiiill recycle them.




Earth Hour

Never bin hidden batteries.



Battery fires

Spring cleaners, bag up 'THAT' box of old cables for recycling



Key moments

5million+ single-use vapes are binned every week



Awareness



Give Back January

Recycle your electricals here




Giant toaster bring bank



Waste Week schools campaign

Ben wants to know what to do with his old electric toothbrush?



Education



What is e-waste and why is it relevant to vapes?



What is e-waste and the legal regulations?

- e-waste (WEEE) is old and unwanted electrical and electronic equipment
 - Most e-waste contains toxic chemicals and is classed as **hazardous waste**
 - If not handled properly at end-of-life they pose a **major threat to the environment**, human health, society, and costs the UK economy through losing precious resources
 - **Recovering materials** like steel, aluminium, copper, gold, silver, lithium and plastics means that we reduce demand for new materials that come from mining and drilling and therefore **protects land and sea environments**.
- e-waste is one of the **fastest-growing sources of waste in the world** – and the UK.
 - 155,000 tonnes of e-waste are thrown away each year by households
 - We are hoarding 527 million items of electricals in UK homes.
- Laws requiring producers and retailers to finance and support collection and recycling of electrical and portable battery products at end-of-life have been in place for 15 years.
- If you place more than 5 tonnes of electricals on the market (as an original manufacturer or as the importer into the UK) you must join a producer compliance scheme (PCS).
- Producers pay the PCS to take on the **producer obligations to finance** the collection, treatment, recovery and environmentally sound disposal of household WEEE
- **Anything with a plug, battery and cable should always be recycled** as a minimum and should never be binned.

Why are discarded vapes such an issue?

- **Vapes = toxic waste.** There are safety issues with the lithium batteries inside them prone to causing fires if damaged when binned in general waste or recycling.
- **Sales have rocketed** over the last couple of years - many new products and market entrants.
 - Range of vape types - single use (disposable), rechargeable with single use chamber (pod) and rechargeable (tank).
- Made of some of the most **valuable resources** on the planet - steel, aluminium, copper, lithium.
- **Environmental damage** caused through widespread littering can endanger wildlife.
- Single use vapes are **marketed as disposable, not recyclable** with **very little communications on options for recycling** them being presented to the public.
- An average of 7.7 million single-use vapes are being sold every week in the UK - and at least **5 million a week are being binned which is 8 per second.**
- Instead of binning, these need to be recycled separately from general waste and recycling.
- Producers, importers, distributors and retailers of single-use vapes need to do a lot more than they are currently doing to **meet their legal and financial responsibilities** under UK waste electrical (WEEE) and portable battery regulations.

Source: [Material Focus research](#)



**Any 3
Disposables £10**



Vapes facts and figures

We are throwing away millions of vapes

In the UK we are **buying 7.7 million single-use vapes per week**, (doubled compared to 2022).

In the UK we are binning **5 million single-use vapes per week**, that is **8 per second** (quadrupled compared to 2022).

Single-use 'disposable' vapes are actually recyclable

- The vapes will be dismantled into parts: battery, casing electronics and nicotine pads which are then treated separately. **Up to 80% of materials within vapes can be recycled.**

There's hidden treasure inside vapes

- **Vape batteries contain lithium** (vital component inside electric vehicle (EV) and energy storage batteries), aluminium, steel, copper, plastics which could be recycled, saving precious resources from being lost forever.
- 5,000 electric vehicle batteries worth of lithium being thrown away per year

Source: [Material Focus research](#)

Vapes - the facts and figures

The lithium inside vapes that are thrown away could be powering the green economy

Our research has found that **5,000 electric vehicle batteries** worth of lithium being thrown away per year

Hidden batteries inside can cause fires if crushed or damaged

Batteries hidden inside vapes can cause fires if crushed or damaged in general recycling or waste streams. Vapes must be recycled separately.

Adding to the problem of e-waste

Binning vapes adds to e-waste which is the **fastest growing waste stream in the world**. In the UK alone we bin over 155,000 tonnes of electrical waste a year.

Source: [Material Focus research](#)



How do I comply with environmental regulations as a producer?



Waste electrical producer responsibilities

- The first UK registered company who places electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) on the market is the “**producer**”.
- This can be the manufacturer, importer or distributor.
- You must register as a producer annually, dependent on how much EEE you sell
 - **less than 5 tonnes/ year** - register with your environmental regulator as a small producer.
 - **more than 5 tonnes/ year** - pay to join a Producer Compliance Scheme (PCS) who will take on your obligations to finance the collection, treatment, recovering and disposal of WEEE.
- As a producer you must also
 - mark electrical products with the crossed out wheelie bin symbol and a date mark.
 - provide information on reuse and environmentally sound treatment of the products and components (includes materials, dangerous substances and preparations) within one year of putting them on the market.
 - Provide your distributors with your producer registration number.

If you do not register as a small producer or join a PCS you are committing an offence and may face enforcement action. Full producer responsibilities detailed on the Gov.uk site [here](#)



How do I comply with environmental regulations as a retailer?



Retailer responsibilities - for all retailers selling electricals

- **All retailers selling electricals** (including vapes) need to provide a way for customers buying new electricals to dispose of their old electricals **on a like-for-like basis**
 - regardless of how you sell the products, whether direct or by internet, mail order or telephone.
- You must take back items that have the same function, regardless of brand. Eg.
 - recycle a customer's old vape when they buy a new one
 - recycle a customer's old e-scooter when they buy a new one.
 - Recycle a video player if the customer buys a DVD player.
- Currently there is no distinction between the types of e-cigarettes or vapes that you sell in regards to takeback obligations
 - All types count the same, therefore if you sell any type of e-cigarette or vape then your are legally required to takeback any type **on a like-for-like basis**
- You have 3 options to offer this take-back service to your customers
 - provide a **free, in store recycling service**
 - set up an **alternative recycling service**
 - join the **Distributor Takeback Scheme (DTS)** - if you sell electricals worth < £100k, or online only
- If you fail to comply with the waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) regulations, you **can be prosecuted and get an unlimited fine** from a magistrates' court or a Crown Court.

* Source: Electrical waste: retailer and distributor responsibilities: Take back waste in store - GOV.UK

Retailer take-back - if you sell electricals online only

Sign up to the Distributor Takeback Scheme (DTS) who manage your take-back obligations on your behalf

- You pay a fee that covers your waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) obligations until 31 December 2023.
- This money goes towards supporting the recycling centres run by local authorities.
- You'll need to keep a record of what information you give to your customers about where they should take their WEEE.

Retailer take-back - if you sell <£100k of electricals

[Sign up to the Distributor Takeback Scheme](#) (DTS) who manage your take-back obligations on your behalf

- You pay a fee that covers your waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) obligations until 31 December 2023.
- This money goes towards supporting the recycling centres run by local authorities.
- You'll need to keep a record of what information you give to your customers about where they should take their WEEE.

Retailer take-back - if you sell >£100k of electricals

(equivalent to c 50 single use vapes/ day)

If your business sells £100,000 or more of electricals per year and has physical stores you'll need to take back waste in store, or set up an alternative collection point instead.

- **In-store take-back**

- Must be free (but can charge for collecting items from customers' homes)
 - Be clearly communicated to customers
 - Give customers at least 28 days to bring back their waste item.
 - Take back all types of electrical and electronic equipment that you sell - you can choose to extend your service to cover all kinds of electrical and electronic waste.
- Brands with multi-site stores selling a variety of different products may need to communicate differently in different stores, and should ensure that store staff advise consumers, that larger goods can only be returned to specific stores.
- If your **electrical and electronic equipment sales area is > 400m²** including aisle, display and shelf space, you must accept any very small electricals* at any store, regardless of whether someone buys a new electrical item there.

*items <25cm on their longest side

HOW TO ORGANISE in-store take-back of electricals and vapes

- To dispose of the electricals you've collected you can do one of the following:
 - Speak to a Producer Compliance Scheme (PCS)
 - [Contact](#) the PCS and agree arrangements and fees
 - PCS will arrange for the waste to be recycled at an Approved Authorised Treatment Facility (AATF).
 - You may be charged for collection and transportation of the waste to the AATF or the PCS collection point.
 - Transport the waste yourself
 - Register as a waste carrier
 - Follow the rules on transporting hazardous waste as 'vapes' are considered hazardous
 - Transport, and drop off the waste at an AATF or PCS collection point yourself.
- Vapes should be collected and stored separately from other small electricals and batteries.
 - If you sell separate batteries for vapes you must also offer free take-back for batteries.
- Keep records of all electrical and electronic waste that you collect and dispose of including the number of units you've received through take back and say how many of these were returned to a PCS. [You can use a template.](#)
 - Include documentation you make, or are given by the PCS or the AATF, when you dispose of electrical and electronic waste.
 - Please see the full lists of approved recyclers, producer compliance schemes (PCS) and approved authorised treatment facilities (AATFs) [on the gov.uk website.](#)
- You also need to keep records of how you tell customers about your take back scheme.
- Keep all your records for 4 years.

Approved vape recycling services

These waste management companies can organise collection and recycling of vapes at Approved Authorised Approved Facilities (AATFs).

The vapes will be dismantled into parts: battery, casing electronics and nicotine pads which are then treated separately. **Up to 80% of materials within vapes can be recycled.**

Biffa - contact: services@biffa.co.uk

Environcom - contact: Alison.mitchell@environcom.co.uk

GAP Group - contact: waste@gapgroupuk.com

Reconomy - contact: enquiries@reconomy.com

Recover - contact: info@eco-recycle.co.uk

SWEEEP - contact: recycle@sweeep.co.uk

Veolia - contact: <https://www.veolia.co.uk/contact-us>

Waste Care - contact: recycling@wastecare.co.uk

Waste Experts - contact: info@wasteexperts.co.uk



Minimum requirement for Retailer Take-back communications

Retailers must accept consumers' old electricals in store for recycling - and **tell customers about this service**. We worked with OPSS/Dept for Business and Trade (DBT) to help **ensure consistency** across all consumer communications. Our toolkit contains **ready-made and editable assets** and key messaging to enable you to meet your obligations. There are **like-for-like, recycle all, and recycle vapes** options.

Mandatory

- Strut card and poster - for use at the checkout/till in-store
- Point of sale comms - for use at the points in the store where you sell electricals
- Website copy - on how customers can reuse and recycle electrical and electronic equipment
- QR code or web address - directing people to your website or Recycle Your Electricals

Optional

- Recycle Your Electricals Recycling Locator link or widget - most comprehensive and accurate locator
- 'Proud supporter'/'recycle here' - available as window decal or stand-alone logo
- Receipt or till prompt
- On-packaging options
- Online point of sale messaging
- 'How to delete data' guide
- Staff training support

Supporting docs

- Recycle Your Electricals brand guidelines

How we can help

Communications support

- **OPSS/Dept for Business & Trade approved retailer take-back comms toolkit** (in-store & website templates, internal comms templates).
 - Take 2 minutes to create account [here](#) to access this toolkit and others.
 - [‘How to delete data’ guide](#)
 - Industry stats, infographics and assets on reusing and recycling electricals to use in your campaigns.

Operational support

- [List of approved recyclers](#)
- Best practice case studies with insights of what works/ doesn't work so well.
- Industry leading Recycling Locator (22,000+ drop off points) + widget for your website - add your stores to help consumers easily locate their nearest electrical recycling drop off points.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards enforces these regulations. You can contact them if you have any questions on compliance or suspected non-compliance.

Office for Product Safety and Standards - OPSS.enquiries@beis.gov.uk

Communications toolkit - download from the partnership portal on our [website here](#)

Recycle your electricals here

Buying a new electrical item?
Recycle the one you're
replacing in-store, for free



Anything with a plug, battery or cable can be
recycled and turned into something new.

**Simply hand your electricals to a staff member,
and they'll do the rest.**



To find out more,
scan here or search
recycleyourelectricals.org.uk/recycleinstore



Please bring in the old electrical item within 28 days, with the receipt for its replacement.
We reserve the right to refuse an item that's too heavy to be picked up by one person or for health and hygiene reasons.

Recycle your electricals here

If you have old unwanted
electricals you can recycle
them in-store for free



Anything with a plug, battery or cable can be
recycled and turned into something new.

**Simply hand your electricals to a staff member,
and they'll do the rest.**



To find out more,
scan here or search
recycleyourelectricals.org.uk/recycleinstore



We reserve the right to refuse an item that's too heavy to be picked up by one person or for health and hygiene reasons.



PROUD SUPPORTER



RECYCLE HERE

Communications toolkit - download from the partnership portal on our [website here](#)

Recycle your vapes here

If you have old vapes, you can recycle them in-store for free



Vapes, and anything else with a plug, battery or cable, can be recycled and turned into something new.

Simply drop off your old vapes for recycling here.



To find out more, scan here or search recycleyourelectricals.org.uk/#recycleinstore



We reserve the right to refuse an item that's too heavy to be picked up by one person or for health and hygiene reasons.

Ailgylchwch eich fêps yma

Prynu fêp newydd? Ailgylchwch yr hen rai yn y siop – am ddim



Gall fêpiau ac unrhyw beth arall sydd â phlwg, batri neu gebyl gael eu hailgylchu a'u troi'n rywbeth newydd.

Gadewch eich fêpiau yma i'w hailgylchu ac mi wnawn ni bob dim arall.



Am ragor o wybodaeth, ewch at ein gwefan recycleyourelectricals.org.uk/#recycleinstore



Fyddym yn cadw'r hawl i wrthod eitem/s'n rhy drwm i gael ei chodi gan un person neu am resymau iechyd a hyllendit.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE vape recycling to the public

NEVER BIN THEM - RECYCLE ALL YOUR VAPES

Batteries in vapes can cause fires when binned

Rechargeable vapes

Recycle the battery separately if it is removable

- If you can remove the battery, drop it in a **battery recycling bin**
- Put the rest of the vape in a **vape recycling bin**
- If there isn't a separate bin for vapes, recycle yours with other small electricals

If the battery is not removable, recycle the whole thing with vapes or other small electricals

Single-use vapes

Leave the battery inside and recycle the whole thing

- Drop the vape in a vape recycling bin
- If there isn't a separate bin for vapes, recycle yours with other small electricals

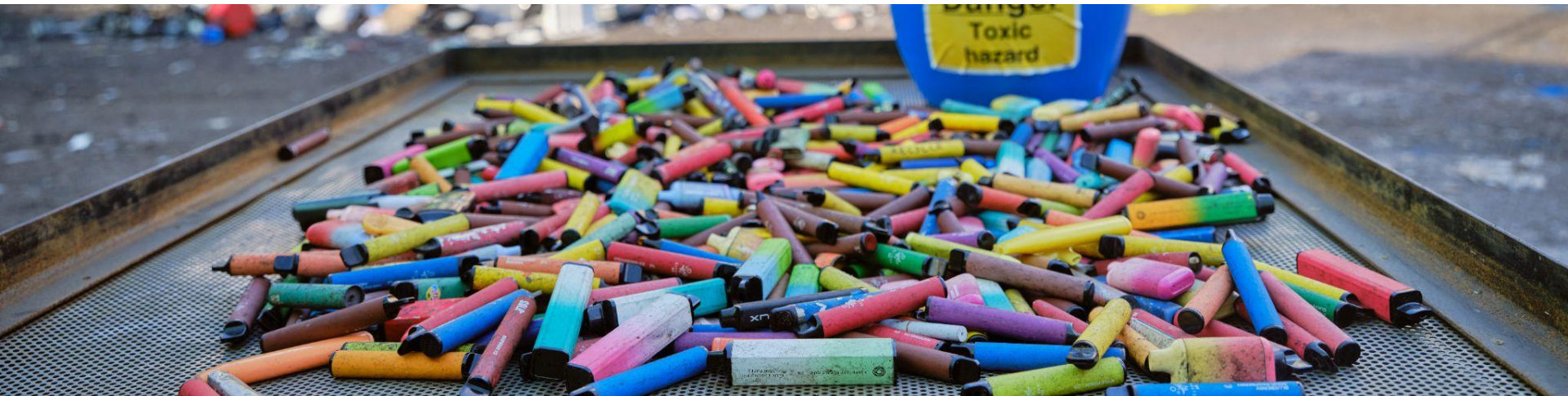
E-liquid/ vape juice pods

These may contain metals or electrical components

- Put pods in the vape recycling bin
- If there isn't a separate bin for vapes, recycle yours with other small electricals



How do I act as a local authority?



Collection from HWRCs via the Producer Balancing System

The **mandatory Producer Balancing System (PBS)** which is part of the current UK WEEE Regulations has recently been modified to process **Regulation 34** requests for vapes arising at Local Authority Household Waste Recycling Centres (LA HWRCs).

This means that vapes separately collected at LA HWRCs can have their collection and recycling funded via the PBS.

LAs may not currently have signage and containers etc. in place at their HWRCs to separately collect vapes.

Any LA wishing to separately collect vapes at an HWRC should **contact the Producer Compliance Scheme (PCS)** they currently work with to discuss next steps.

Current recommendations and advice

1. **Ask your producer compliance scheme and/ or waste management company** for local guidance to give to residents about recycling vapes. Drop off points will differ by area.
2. **Display our vape recycling poster** at HWRCs, advising on the safe disposal and recycling of vapes. Download it [here](#) from the gated section of the Material Focus website.
3. **Create social media posts** using our vapes communication toolkit. It includes ready to use social media assets with suggested copy. Download from the gated section of our website [here](#).

If you've not yet created an account, it takes 2 minutes to do - just sign up as a local authority.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE vape recycling to the public

NEVER BIN THEM - RECYCLE ALL YOUR VAPES

Batteries in vapes can cause fires when binned

Rechargeable vapes

Recycle the battery separately if it is removable

- If you can remove the battery, drop it in a **battery recycling bin**
- Put the rest of the vape in a **vape recycling bin**
- If there isn't a separate bin for vapes, recycle yours with other small electricals

If the battery is not removable, recycle the whole thing with vapes or other small electricals

Single-use vapes

Leave the battery inside and recycle the whole thing

- Drop the vape in a vape recycling bin
- If there isn't a separate bin for vapes, recycle yours with other small electricals

E-liquid/ vape juice pods

These may contain metals or electrical components

- Put pods in the vape recycling bin
- If there isn't a separate bin for vapes, recycle yours with other small electricals

HWRC vape posters - for separate collection or with other small mixed WEEE





Environment Agency update March 2023:

Ban on incineration of vapes



Producer Responsibility Regulatory Service - WEEE

weee@environment-agency.gov.uk

16 March 2023

Dear Scheme / AATF

Incineration of Vapes

The Environment Agency is aware of current concerns being expressed surrounding the incineration of disposable vapes. Our position on this matter is as follows.

Regulation 31 of the WEEE Regulations requires Producer Compliance Schemes (PCS) to set up systems that provide for the separate collection and treatment of WEEE using best available collection, treatment, recovery, and recycling techniques, for any WEEE for which they are responsible. It also requires that PCSs make sure the WEEE is treated at an ATF (Authorised Treatment Facility). As vapes are in scope of the WEEE regulations, this regulation applies to vapes.

All ATFs must operate in compliance with their permit, which includes a condition that BATRRRT (Best Available Treatment Recovery and Recycling Techniques) is used to treat the WEEE they accept. In the case of vapes this will include the removal of batteries and liquids. If such a recycling technique for vapes is reasonably available (e.g. manual dismantling) then an ATF must use it.

Whole vapes should not be incinerated.

Any fractions from the treatment of vapes that contain POPs need to be managed in a way that ensures the POPs are destroyed or irreversibly transformed.

Queries?

If you have any queries please contact us via weee@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - Ban on incineration of vapes

1. Regulation 31 of the WEEE Regulations requires Producer Compliance Schemes (PCS) to set up systems that provide for the separate collection and treatment of WEEE using best available collection, treatment, recovery, and recycling techniques, for any WEEE for which they are responsible. It also requires that PCSs make sure the WEEE is treated at an ATF (Authorised Treatment Facility).
As vapes are in scope of the WEEE regulations, this regulation applies to vapes.
2. All ATFs must operate in compliance with their permit, which includes a condition that BATRRT (Best Available Treatment Recovery and Recycling Techniques) is used to treat the WEEE they accept. In the case of vapes this will include the removal of batteries and liquids. If such a recycling technique for vapes is reasonably available (e.g. manual dismantling) then an ATF must use it.
3. **Whole vapes should not be incinerated.**
4. Any fractions from the treatment of vapes that contain POPs need to be managed in a way that ensures the POPs are destroyed or irreversibly transformed.

If you have any queries please contact weee@environment-agency.gov.uk



700 TONNES OF COPPER
hidden in unwanted cables in UK homes



Unwanted cables
stashed away in
UK homes could
circle the Earth
**MORE THAN
5 TIMES**



Erin wants to know what to do
with her bag of old electricals?



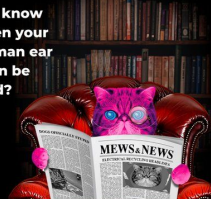
Our unwanted
electricals have a
£160 MILLION
DONATION VALUE
that could help
those in need



We purchase a massive
53.5 MILLION
**ELECTRICAL
ITEMS**
between Black Friday
and Christmas



Did you know
that even your
tiny human ear
buds can be
recycled?



Every year, the
magnetic materials
recycled from our old
tech could help build
**2,661 WIND
TURBINES**



10,000 new recycling points
Drops still UK's most favourite pet



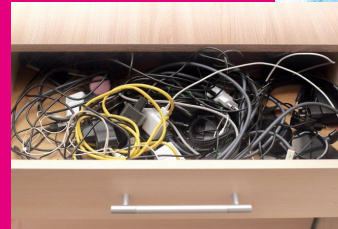
A massive
8 in 10
of us have been
DECLUTTERING
in lockdown
this year!



**MORE DATA
FOR KIDS =
MORE KIDS
LEARNING
ABOUT
RECYCLING**



This New Year we'll
throw away or hoard
OVER 5 MILLION
**UNWANTED
ELECTRICALS**
as a result of Christmas
spending



Hoarding at
31 million
old laptops
hidden in UK homes
could provide enough
aluminium to make
**159,000
bikes**



Kim from Essex wants to
know if her son's remote
control car can be recycled?



There are nearly
12 MILLION
**UNWANTED
KETTLES**
going spare
in UK households



There are over
200 MILLION
**UNWANTED
CABLES, LAPTOPS
& SPEAKERS**
stashed away
across the UK



Rahul from Manchester wants to
know what to do with his
soaking wet phone?!



There are over
8 MILLION
**UNWANTED
HAIR DRYERS**

in UK households,
waiting to blow
away the cobwebs



Nearly 1 in 3
of us have
**SECRETLY
DITCHED**
a partner's old
kitchen gadgets



44% of us
**ADMIT TO
CHUCKING**
obsolete music
equipment



UK households are hoarding



527 million
small old electricals, an average
of nearly 20 per household

Contact

The *Recycle Your Electricals* campaign is led by Material Focus.

Material Focus is a not-for-profit organisation - our vision is of a world where materials are never wasted.

Please follow us and share our content on social media



facebook.com/recycleyourelectricals



[@recycleelectric](https://twitter.com/recycleelectric)



[@recycleyourelectricals_](https://instagram.com/recycleyourelectricals)



www.recycleyourelectricals.org.uk



hello@materialfocus.org.uk



linkedin.com/company/materialfocus