



*Working document last updated 23rd August 2023*

# 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.

# 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 willlllll recycle them.

Earth Hour



Never bin hidden batteries.

Battery fires



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

Key moments



More than **ONE MILLION** single-use vapes are thrown away **EVERY WEEK**

recycle your electricals

Awareness



Give Back January



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?

- 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?

- **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.
- **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.
- **Single use vapes** marketed as **disposable** with almost **zero communications or options for recycling** them being presented to the public.
- 1,000s of millions of single-use vapes have been sold in the UK - and at least **over a million a week are being binned and sent to landfill or incineration.**
- 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.



**Any 3  
Disposables** **£10**





# Vapes facts and figures

## We are throwing away millions of vapes

In the UK, we buy 500 million vapes a year and bin 156 million of them, equivalent to **3 million vapes binned every week**. That includes single-use, rechargeable with a single-use chamber and rechargeable vapes..

## Single-use 'disposable' vapes are actually recyclable

- 1.3 million single use vapes binned/ week.
- 2 single use vapes binned/ second.
- 22 football pitches worth of single use vapes binned/ year.

## 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.

Source: [Material Focus research](#)



# Vapes - the facts and figures

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

Materials inside single use vapes thrown away every year **could power 1,200 electric vehicles.**

## 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?**



# 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.
  - take back a customer's old vape when they buy a new one
  - take back a customer's old kettle when they buy a new one.
  - take back a video player if the customer buys a DVD player.
- You have 3 options to offer this take-back service to your customers
  - provide a [free, in store, take back service](#)
  - set up an [alternative, free take back 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 fined** up to £5,000 at a magistrates' court, or get an unlimited fine from 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 > 400m<sup>2</sup> 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.
  - Sign up to a Producer Compliance Scheme (PCS)
    - [Contact](#) the PCS and agree fee
    - 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.
  - Includes documentation you make, or are given by the PCS or the AATF, when you dispose of electrical and electronic waste.
- You also need to keep records of how you tell customers about your take back scheme.



# 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](mailto:services@biffa.co.uk)

## **Environcom**

Contact: [Alison.mitchell@environcom.co.uk](mailto:Alison.mitchell@environcom.co.uk)

## **GAP Group**

Contact: [waste@gapgroupuk.com](mailto:waste@gapgroupuk.com)

## **Veolia**

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

## **Waste Care**

Contact: [recycling@wastecare.co.uk](mailto:recycling@wastecare.co.uk)

## **Waste Experts**

Contact: [info@wasteexperts.co.uk](mailto:info@wasteexperts.co.uk)



# HOW TO communicate take-back of electricals - and vapes

Use our [OPSS/ BEIS approved communications toolkit](#) to help ensure consistency across all consumer communications relating to retailer take-back. In the toolkit you'll find **key editable assets** that you can adapt to your own retailer branding.

As a minimum requirement, OPSS advise you must include consumer messages on retailer take-back on

- Strut card at till, or in-store poster - editable.
- Point of sale - ideally BEIS have asked for communication at the points in the store where you sell electricals.
- Website content - to explain more about WEEE regulations and advise customer on options.
- QR code/web address - directing people to your website or Recycle Your Electricals.

We have also included the following optional items in the toolkit

- Proud supporter of Recycle Your Electricals campaign logo - as a png, eps.
- Window decals - 'proud supporter'/ 'recycle here'.
- Till prompt.
- Packaging options.
- Online point of sale messaging.
- Staff training - key points.

Contact Nick Birch, Brand Partnerships Manager, [nick@materialfocus.org.uk](mailto:nick@materialfocus.org.uk) to find out more.

# How we can help

## Communications support

- **OPSS/ BEIS 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.
- Recycling Locator (40,000 visits/month) + widget for your website - add your stores to help consumers easily locate their nearest electrical recycling drop off points.

## Co-ordination support

- Vapes briefing shared with industry stakeholders.
- Continuing discussions with industry stakeholders to help agree an action plan to tackle this significant and growing issue.

# 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



## Guidance for local authorities





## 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.**

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





# Environment Agency update March 2023: Ban on incineration of vapes



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 [wee@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:wee@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.**
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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](mailto:weee@environment-agency.gov.uk)



**700 TONNES OF COPPER** hidden in unwanted cables in UK homes

recycle your electricals



Unwanted cables stashed away in UK homes could circle the Earth

**MORE THAN 5 TIMES**

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals



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

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals

**30,000** new recycling points

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals



From a £1 million and rising, we've now received a massive **159,000 bikes**

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals



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

recycle your electricals

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

recycle your electricals

There are over **8 MILLION UNWANTED HAIR DRYERS** in UK households, waiting to blow away the cobwebs

recycle your electricals



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

recycle your electricals



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

recycle your electricals

UK households are hoarding **527 million** small old electricals, an average of nearly 30 per household

recycle your electricals

# 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](https://facebook.com/recycleyourelectricals)



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



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



[www.recycleyourelectricals.org.uk](http://www.recycleyourelectricals.org.uk)



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