

'Pay as you throw' at UK recycling centres?

The Western division of Cork County Council has introduced a 'pay-by-weight' procedure. Tom Freyberg talks to the council who says the system is a success. Could it work in the UK? And in terms of weighbridge systems, what choice is on the market?

THE LOCAL Government Association (LGA) recently urged the government to give councils 'save as you throw' (another way of saying 'pay as you throw') powers. With the intention of encouraging people to take more responsibility for the way they dispose of their rubbish, the powers to impose pay as you throw will require central government to bring in new legislation.

Although this news may come as unpleasant news to UK residents, paying money for the amount of rubbish they throw out, the scheme has already been trialed and proven successful in Southern Ireland.

Known as Pay-by-Weight (PBW), the Western division of Cork County Council carried out a trial towards the end of 2001 and throughout 2002. A PBW collection was then fully implemented in January 2003.

Jerome O'Sullivan, senior executive officer of environmental services, cork county council (Western Division), explains how the charging works: "Residents have to pay a charge of 120 euros per annum. We then charge 47 cents per kg for the amount of municipal waste collected. Our experience in the West is that since PBW has been introduced from the intro period in 2003, we are sending 40% less waste to landfill."

However, if a local authority implements a PBW collection, what is stopping residents from taking their municipal waste to a local recycling centre and disposing of it free of charge?

One solution is to introduce a weighing procedure at recycling centres that works on the same premise as the household collection: residents are charged for the amount of waste they dispose.

This is a solution which the Western division of Cork brought in recently, as the senior executive officer says: "In 2005 we opened a recycling centre in Clonakilty and can report that in 2006 we had over 92,000 visits. Seeing as the population of the town is approximately 3,800, this is a record figure."

"There are two weighing systems at the site, firstly a weighbridge which controls the waste or tonnage that our own waste collection truck collects from the site. There is also a smaller set of scales at the entrance which controls the amount of waste residents bring in."

How does the cost of disposing rubbish at the recycling centre compare with that of the council collection?

"Cork County Council believes that a charge of 67 cents per kg to dispose of waste at the facility compares favourably with the doorstep collection costs of 120 euro per annum standing charge plus 47 cents per kg collected. The cost of disposal of waste at the site has to take into account the process with which the waste is transported to landfill and the added costs."

Barry Napper, managing director at Doncaster based weighing systems and solutions company, Barry Napper & Co, explains how the collection service could benefit the weighing industry.



Residents of the Western division of County Cork pay a charge of 67 cents per kg to dispose of their municipal waste

"As suppliers on on-board vehicle weighing systems and solutions, we naturally think that 'pay as you throw' is an excellent thing, and will become a necessity in this country."

However, the managing director goes on to point out that a weighing process at a recycling centre would not necessarily be as successful in the UK as it has been in Southern Ireland.

"Listening to residents in our local area does not encourage me to think that, generally, they will be happy to have to go through a weighing procedure before disposing of waste at a recycling centre."

"Travelling around County Cork last summer, I was impressed by the recycling facilities available, but interested to see and smell many backyard bonfires, and they didn't smell like barbecues."

Contrary to Mr Napper, Mark Wilcox, business development manager of De Icing Management Systems, thinks weighing at recycling centres will prove successful.

"Introducing weighing procedures at public recycling centres will further improve statistical data to be collated and allow more accurate and reliable figures to be published regarding our improved recycling. With the effects of global warming being on everybody's mind - savings made with support from hard facts can only encourage further improvements."

Mr Wilcox explains how PBW will prove beneficial to De Icing Management Systems: "Implementation of pay by weight will evolve in the UK soon - following systems implemented overseas, which are providing hugely increased recycling efficiency

"We are currently working in conjunction with many of the major on board vehicle weighing suppliers to integrate our GPS solution. This will allow proof of weight of the vehicle along a route - protecting against overloading."

"Recording of bin lift by location along with weight and house identity will be integrated allowing a PBW scheme to be implemented and monitored."

"Currently the Exactrak system is viewed through the internet by local councils / contractors, but could be made available to the general public in a condensed format, giving collection times as the vehicle travels along its route."

However, it is not just residential waste at recycling centres that can now be weighed. Another example of the weighing procedure is within a civic amenity site in Northern Ireland where commercial waste can now be measured.

Arthur McCun, waste management manager at Newtownabbey Borough Council, Northern Ireland, says: "We recently carried out a renovation of the Bruslee recycling and civic amenity site on the Belfast Road, Ballyclare. Here we installed two Globeweigh weighbridges, one for driving in and one for the vehicles to exit."

"The council charges for the commercial waste coming into the site and the system has an account set up for each of the customers. The customers must have credit on their account and the system will then charge them pro rata for the amount of commercial waste they have deposited."

"Before the Globeweigh weighbridges were installed, the waste coming into the site was increasing every year. But after the installation,

we saw a 50% reduction of people coming to the site."

Be it weighbridges at a public recycling centre or weighbridges at material reprocessing facilities (MRF), the time it takes for installation is an important factor when deciding which manufacturer to choose.

Sheffield-based Libra weighing machines say it can deliver and install pre-cast weighbridge foundations in two hours.

"Libra has now developed patented pre-cast foundations for weighbridges, which incorporate the access ramps and foundation bases, all complete and ready for instant installation, on the same day as the weighbridge."

Once a weighbridge has installed, one problem that local authorities or businesses might face is when vehicles are overloaded but don't have access to these weighing facilities.

One solution to the problem of overloading is to fit axle load indicators that can measure the weight the vehicle is exerting on each axle. Axle Load indicators and On-Board Weighing specialists Red Forge says it has seen a recent increase in the use of axle load indicators, tied in to vehicle telematics systems (VTS).

Set up to provide warnings of overload events, along with logged date, time and location, these systems allow remote monitoring of the load condition of a vehicle, which helps to maximise the control companies have over their vehicles.

Red Forge goes on to say that the Limited VTS unit allows this remote monitoring option to be used for large fleets which have difficulty knowing what the potential payload of a vehicle might be.